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VENICE

The Lion and the Peacock



# VENICE

## The Lion and the Peacock

*Laurence Scarfe*



with drawings by the Author

LONDON  
ROBERT HALE

1952

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## INTRODUCTION

LEGEND says that at midday on the twenty-fourth day of March, anno domini 413, the emigrants from Padua laid the first stones on the Rialto. Fleeing from the miseries of war, they founded a new trading post, which was destined to become one of the greatest and most durable commercial enterprises ever carried out by a community in Europe. We shall never know just how much the early settlers knew of the wonderful possibilities of their position at the head of the Adriatic, how much was foresight and how much was extraordinary good fortune. That they knew of their position in regard to the Italian mainland, which had been, as it is now, a battle ground from time immemorial, is sure enough, for they had but recently left it in fear and disgust, to squat upon a series of melancholy islands inhabited by water fowl. That they knew of their position in regard to the lands of the Eastern Mediterranean can be safely assumed, but it is less sure that they could have foreseen all the possibilities of their relationship with India and the East. As time went on and the events of history developed, they found themselves extraordinarily well situated, on a tight group of islands unassailable both from the mainland and from the sea, living and prospering on the great trade

route from East to West. Venice became, in effect, a huge emporium—a shining example of a city state with sufficient sense to live peaceably at home on the wealth of the world, amidst neighbours constantly torn by strife and jealousy, in a place where nobody could get at her, fighting her battles on the territory of those less favourably situated.

Fortune smiled upon Venice—much to the chagrin of others—and not merely granted her the gift of wealth and an astute company of merchants, but enabled her to thrive just at the right period of history, when the clouds were lifting from the Dark Ages on one of the greatest periods of civilization the world has ever known. The acquirement of wealth gave rise to the usual passion for glory, and at a time when men still had an active sense of beauty generations of Venetians gave themselves up to a robust form of elegant living, building a city of palaces and churches and arranging for themselves an endless series of fêtes, processions and carnivals for the glorification of their state. Never were the proceeds of commerce so well sublimated into art, and never did art so consistently grace the growth of an economic system. But fortune ever gives with one hand and takes with the other, and just at that time when the star of Venice was shining brightest and the coffers were overflowing, as though to spite the Venetians and pay them out for being too successful, a new India was discovered in the opposite direction to the old one. The Americas, a hitherto unsuspected string of continents and islands lurking in uncharted seas, provided the furious rivals of Venice with a much-hoped-for alternative as a source of wealth. (Venetian traders coming home from Tudor England in 1497 reported to an incredulous and self-satisfied city how a countryman of theirs, John Cabot, had planted the Banner of St. Mark next to the English flag upon Newfoundland, but though the story was little heeded it was prophetic of the end of Venice.) Thus the discovery of America marked the beginning of the decline of Venice—as the development of America, a process not yet completed, may well mark the eclipse of Europe.

So great, however, had Venice become at that time, and so glorious was the city, caught up in the passion of her own activities, bemused by her own beauty, that for many more generations the Republic remained intact, until, after a few hundred years of splendid and finally boisterous decadence, Napoleon broke into the city, as he had broken into many another, and the last Doge abdicated. On

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June the fourth, 1797, a "Tree of Liberty" was planted in the Piazza San Marco, the "Libro d'Oro" containing the names of the proud families of Venice, and the Ducal insignia were burned. The first foreign conqueror for a thousand years trod upon the Rialtine Islands, and the Republic was dead. Once more Venice was isolated, now bereft of wealth and empire, rich only in works of art and the glorious memories of an heroic past, her impoverished noble families living in the great palaces where their forefathers had made history and lived so splendidly, secure in the knowledge that their city was the most beautiful in the world, but tormented by the idea that it was also the most useless.

\* \* \*

WHAT under the circumstances was to be done with Venice? By the nineteenth century America was busily taking advantage of European inventions, still fighting Red Indians and laying railways. The British were in India and in many other places besides. The nations of Europe were still quarrelling and founding new industrial empires. But Venice was stranded, a unique survival from the past, a quiet city of incredible beauty, languishing, her buildings slowly dropping into the canals for want of repair. At this time she must have presented a scene of romantic decay, and she became a haunt for poets, musicians, writers and eccentric foreign residents, who seem to have lived here for almost nothing, dreaming in the moonlight. They were, had they but known it, laying the foundations of the new Venice, providing the sentimental basis for the romanticism which underlies the tourist trade of the twentieth century. Byron, Browning, Wagner, Ruskin—and even such delightful creatures as Marie Corelli, who brought a gondola back to sail on the river at Stratford-on-Avon—and a host of others from many countries published the nature and charms of Venice to the world. The Venetians, tired of penury and possessing, as always, a subtle and civilized sense of humour, realizing that fortune had not entirely deserted them, seized upon this idea with alacrity. They did what many more have had to do since—they sold their antiques and opened their houses to visitors. By the end of the nineteenth century tourists began to come to Venice again in increasing numbers, and now, halfway through the twentieth, we can safely say that the tourist trade is firmly established and is, in fact, the staple industry. The decay was repaired, the cornices and balconies

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made safe, bathrooms and lavatories installed for the fussy, eighteenth-century methods of sewage disposal abolished, magnificent hotels complete with telephone systems built inside old palaces, a causeway constructed over the sea from the mainland to bring rail and road traffic, aqueducts under the sea to bring fresh water, the desolate beaches of the Lido prepared for the hosts of people who were sure to want to take their clothes off and lie in the sea, and latterly an aerodrome for those who drop out of the sky. . . .

Today Venice must be assessed afresh, for we are halfway through a new century. It is no good coming to Venice with a long face. This is no longer the Venice of sombre Byzantium, of the fresh, hopeful days of the Renaissance, the fulsome days of the Baroque or the elegant days of the Settecento: for though the scenes of all these periods are still here, hardly changed at all in their particular beauties since the days they were erected, the only play enacted today is the Comedy of Tourism, our own especial kind. Thousands of people come here annually from all parts of the world, to live, for a span, the odd outside-life of tourism, living round the perimeter of the real, secret life of Venice, making little contact with the Venetians and using the seductive city for the purposes of their own brand of romanticism. Everyone who comes to Venice for the first time comes as though on a honeymoon. Venice is an escape from the ugliness of other towns, from the everyday tasks of the twentieth century, from the great problems of this century. It provides the ideal solution for the modern holiday, for those who want to marvel at works of art and for those who merely want to sit in the sun. The only fear one can possibly have is that it might become too popular, with all that that implies. Furthermore, though the tourists support the Venetians, it is almost literally true to say that the Venetians of today are living on the work of their ancestors. Tintoretto, Titian, Carpaccio, Bellini and Tiepolo, Sansovino, Palladio and Longhena are keeping the people of today. It is fortunate for them that art is eternally alive or they could otherwise be accused of living off the body of a corpse. . . . Venice, however, is no less wonderful for all that, and no praise can be too high for her beauties, no description can equal the reality, and no artists, except in occasional flights of fancy, have been able to convey her true flavour. Of all places, Venice must be seen to be believed.

It is no longer the Monte Carlo it was in the eighteenth century, the city of the Grand Tour; it is no longer what it was in the nine-

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teenth century. It is something quite new today, but continuing its life with all the trimmings of a new century. The extraordinary thing is that the twentieth century has taken on so well in Venice, and it has in no way diminished its splendour. Modern luxuries—the grand hotel, neon, chromium, speed-boats and all the hundred and one things we have tagged on to the old Venice—fall so short of its past glories that they have been quietly absorbed. Therein lies her great charm: we can have the past, we can have the present, both at their best, but what little of the present we have is completely subservient to a greater idea, an idea which we, with all our cleverness and inventions, are no longer capable of having.

\* \* \*

THE tourist must always live in a world-above-a-world and it is his privilege to be bewitched. Despite the all-too-obvious signs of hardship among many of her citizens, Venice gives abundantly of the better things of life. The warm world of pleasure must always remain a greater reality to the tourist than the politics argued around the Scalzi Bridge, and, once away from the lifelines of the railway and the motor road, the aim of Venice is quite frankly to amuse, and the object of the visitor is to enjoy himself. The tourist is therefore mostly aware of the ornamental, and however much he may penetrate beyond the wiles of art, both old and new, it is through them that he must form his final impressions. Yet in the last analysis these impressions must always remain personal: they can make no greater claim than that.

The aim of this book is not the barren pursuit of æsthetics but an attempt to follow some of the threads of social life backwards and forwards through the arts of the past and into the twentieth century, as though we were eternal tourists: to pursue, in fact, the pleasant dream of Venice, at all times fantastic, through the minds of the artists who recorded so much of her history, and to reconstruct from their pictures and buildings certain aspects of the city. It turns out to be in the end the pursuit of pleasure, in a city where humanists always have been, and still are, able to enjoy themselves.

In the section on the Arts of Venice I have selected, though not at random, but mainly because they develop this theme, certain paintings and buildings to offset the contemporary scene. We all too readily tend to regard the art treasures of the past as a bag of sweets into which we dip for the sake of their pleasant taste, but though I have



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not ignored, nor would be able to ignore, æsthetic merits, I have selected my examples so as to piece together, fragment by fragment, the final picture. With such an object in mind, gallery-going and the ghoulish visiting of tombs can become an interesting occupation to enrich the already abundant life of today. Yet in galleries and churches we are given to dreaming: the excitements of the past are muted, we move among memories and echoes. . . . Nostalgia leads to melancholy, though in Venice more pleasantly than anywhere else. . . .

I have purposely selected work for discussion that is available in Venice at the present time, of which there is more than enough to illustrate my theme, though many Venetian masterpieces are dispersed throughout the world.

*Ponte Salute, 1951*

## PART ONE



## *Entry by Railway*

**I**N our time there is little of the sensation of the Grand Tour about the journey to Venice, for not one of the various machines that takes us there, the train, the motor car, the aeroplane or even the humble bicycle, bears any resemblance to the slow and stately roll of the stage coach, and though it may be preferable to approach Venice by sea, as was intended, few people these days go to the trouble of arranging such a detour. Yet in spite of our new methods of travel Venice still remains secure on her islands in the middle of the shining sea, and it is only after many hours of subdued excitement that we reach her. This exhausting delay has all the painful thrills of courtship, for only the most prosaic of men would say that he was not already in love before he went. The pain is exquisite, the hours of sleeplessness are full of the fever of anticipation, and the only one of the senses that seems to keep at all normal is the appetite.

For here we are on the Simplon-Orient Express, the most romantic and most exciting train in Europe. . . .

The sensation of speed as we sit in our little upholstered compartment, and the fantastic spectacle of the Alps as we pass through them, increase the sense of unreality, and it is only punctuated by the dinner bells, and later by the gentlemen of the customs who come to interrupt our noisy but drowsy insomnia with their rubber stamps and awkward questions. We are trundled and shunted through the Alps, and rush through the tunnels and the hollows of the mountains in the weird blue light from the tiny bulb, and endeavour to keep our feet warm as the cold, stale air forces its way through the flapping blinds. In the Simplon Tunnel the nightmare reaches its height, for there we are almost asphyxiated by an inrush of smoke, until the whole train is full of coughing and spluttering people in a fog more dense and more virulent than ever was reported to occur in London. The corridors are full of agonized shapes bent double and almost crawling about for air, and for the next two hours we struggle for breath and wheeze and whistle as though

in the throes of bronchitis. No sooner are we settled and about to resume our troubled dream than the excitable Yugoslav lady in the next compartment breaks in on us thinking that we are the lavatory. . . .

Dawn, still the most innocent of pleasures, restores a certain amount of sanity to the ride, and though we are covered with grit and in a state of disarray, the scenery outside by no means brings us back to complete normality, for here is the landscape of astonishment! Miles and miles of waste matter, mountains of rocks still weeping with the agony of upheaval. Alps shrouded in clouds of melancholy, tipped with snow of desolation, a scene of turbulent and terrifying beauty, dripping with rain. There is water everywhere, gulleys filled to overflowing, watershoots rushing into boiling rivers, waterfalls dashing themselves into valleys strewn with boulders. Occasionally in the clean grey light we pass various smelting works sending up fountains of orange sparks, but everything is dwarfed by mountains. . . . And we fall to thinking how people living in this gigantic setting came to make such delicate things as wrist watches. . . . We pass tiny villages perched on inaccessible heights, and, nearer to the railway, towns of unusual cleanliness and neatness, in moss green, pale pink, white and slate-grey, and then at last we reach the great stretch of Lake Maggiore lying like a pool of tears and we are in the Plain of Lombardy.

The dreams and mists of the night, the odd sensations of burrowing and panting, of being drenched with rain, and of being half suffocated in the middle of a mountain, give way to something akin to relief and happiness, as the train, now busy with the bustle of breakfast, slips down into Italy. During the night too, at some point in our dream, the train has changed its character, for now everything is Italian instead of French, and for the first time we bring out the little bundle of dirty notes that we had saved for a whole year left over from the last trip to Italy, and for which we so cunningly risked our reputations with those international watchdogs whose sole purpose in life is to harry poor travellers and preserve the parish boundaries of a quickly shrinking Europe. But even this *peccadillo*, which makes us momentarily share the thrill of international racketeers, is quickly forgotten at the sight of Italy. Italy again! At last we are on the right side of the Alps! For some reason which I can never understand, Italy gives me confidence: clouds of doubt, storms of indecision, little cold winds of fear, all seem to get

left behind at the first sight of the sun and the classical neatness of the countryside. It is useless to keep repeating that we all come home to Italy, but sometimes the commonplace expression is the most apt.

The journey across the Plain of Lombardy gives us just sufficient time to make the adjustment between the world we have left behind and the world we will live in when we reach Venice, and though it may be quicker to go by air and settle down on the Lido like a mosquito, this interim period is very valuable, for of all the cities in the world Venice is a city of the horizon and it is better to slide into it gradually than to drop into it from above. Furthermore, this gradual ride, when we have left the straggling ugliness of Milan behind, is very beautiful, like a ride on a scenic railway through a vast garden, studded with towns whose very names conjure up a hundred pleasant associations—Brescia, Verona, Vicenza, Padua, each with its city walls, its towers, villas and cathedral. But each also with its scars from the war, for the armies swept this way, and there are still many wrecked buildings with pock-marked plaster, and on the sidings an occasional row of burnt-out coaches and rolling-stock.

Very soon, to the north, the Alps become a distant fringe, with magnificent pile upon pile of cumulus clouds suddenly halted by the heat of the plain, while around us on every side stretches a green and cultivated landscape, clear and crisp in the morning sun. The fields of reddish earth are hedged with sycamores, willows and acacias, and as far as eye can see there is a topiary of tall Lombardy poplars looking like columns with statues on them. Vines are festooned among dwarf poplars and along poles, the maize fields wave their silvery tassels and sunflowers dot the shrill green with violent spots of yellow. Along the pale green rivers and the canals are banks of rushes and reeds and occasionally a cluster of tufted bamboo. Hay-makers, in large straw hats, slowly turn the swathes—the hats, the flesh, the hay and the earth all burnt to the same colour—while in other fields white oxen slowly lumber or draw the hay-carts down narrow lanes. Farm buildings, built in Roman style round an enclosed quadrangle, stand out against the viridian, their walls washed pink or red, or even pure ultramarine with white paintwork, while in their gardens June roses hang like paper flowers. The roofs are of Roman tiles and are sometimes enlivened by statues; statues of the saints appear in niches in the walls, and on one occasion there is a

house with an amphora built into the apex of the gable. Interspersed among the farms are severe villas, box-like and white, blossoming at the top with baroque cornices and heraldic devices, or else old churches newly repaired since the war, with gleaming white sculptures of modern design, among hamlets of tumbledown houses where the washing blows. All is a colour scheme of ochre, light red, emerald, white and cocoa pink.

The stations too have been largely rebuilt since the war, in a style that is cheerful and practical. They are oases of noise and commotion, and seem to be used as social clubs as much as anything. The arrival of a train produces a crescendo of excitement, the sleepers awake, the young men cease from gossiping, the old ones stop their card playing, families struggle in emotional ganglions either to get on or to get off the train. Nuns break through obliquely with their black bundles, and boys thrust their gleaming chromium bicycles through the crush. Then there are the young and handsome policemen, serious and helmeted, hands behind their backs, pistols at their sides, who always perambulate in pairs with great dignity, followed by ice-cream and mineral-water sellers. We on the train lean out of our windows bemused, and read underneath, upside down, the names on the white board—Paris, Milano, Venezia, Trieste, Beograd, Istanbul. . . .

As we near the green flat lands of Mestre everything becomes more quiet and deserted. The flat verges of the track grow clover, small blue convolvulus, wild barley and poppies, and we are more conscious of the puffing of the engine. Among the tall poplars the campaniles with their conical roof caps hint at Venice. There are belfries, poplars and pylons stretching to the horizons on either side, while nearer, the waving emerald fronds of the acacias are stirred by the passing of the train. Mestre, the last station before Venice, is the nearest small town on the mainland, but it is so near to Venice that I doubt if anybody has noticed it very much. I have only the most fleeting memory of its appearance, for when I go through it I am too excited and when I come back I am far too sad. On this occasion there were a few gipsies camped in a field, their bony horses, unharnessed, wandering and nibbling at the edges. . . . Then we were off again: next stop Venice. Very quickly now we glide along. The sky opens up, and the light becomes more brilliant as we near the sea. The trees become bushes and then scrub, the fields become marshes, and then turn into iron-rust mud-flats, which in their turn become grey.

Among the mud-flats, veined and channelled, are winding canals, and upon them black barges with orange sails.

The canals open out into shallow pools, and the train is soon upon the causeway joining Venice to the mainland. Telegraph wires, cables and other life-lines swing out over the lagoons, and the whole vast seascape, dwarfed now by the great expanse of sky, is stuck with poles and pylons, which fade away among the low-lying islands in a bright and dazzling haze. Far away and scarcely visible are Torcello, Burano and Murano, and, as the train rides rapidly over the sea, the towers and domes of Venice begin to appear, colourless yet and indistinguishable, shimmering between sky and sea behind a moving screen of poles. Soon, as we near Venice, things begin to sort themselves out: the pylons fade and the towers get bigger, until, over all, rises the Campanile di San Marco. Colours become defined from the general haze, golden ochre, pink and white, as the shabby buildings of the northern *fondamente* take shape, with boats moored up against them, black and ultramarine, with sails of orange and red. In front of us is the outsize bright green dome of San Simeone Piccolo, and the low-lying platforms of the station. We are in Venice at last. We have entered by the back gate, by the tradesman's entrance. . . .

The station has a matter-of-fact charm. It is built of concrete, and the awnings of the platforms have ceilings of what might be either shining glass mosaic or fish scales laid in cement. There is a row of potted flowers and palms in earthenware tubs, glossy magazine stalls and all the usual appointments, including a fountain of drinking water. We learn as time goes on that this is no ordinary station, for from it we not only enter one of the most exotic of cities, but say goodbye to many a friend. Venice is a place of comings and goings, and the station the beginning and ending of Venice for the majority of visitors. Thus, perforce, this small terminus at the end of a causeway over the sea takes on an added importance, and though there is little to admire, we become attached to it in a special way. It is one thing, meanwhile, to enter the station, but quite another to get out, for no sooner are we through the barrier than we have to undergo an ordeal by porters. Twenty men in white suits, each with the name of an important hotel engraved upon his hat and his heart, arrange themselves in a row on either side of the corridor, and each, with all the good intentions in the world, thinks that we have come to stay at his especial hotel. As the names of these grand



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places are shouted out, it is embarrassing for us to know that ours is a meaner destination, and disheartening for them that they are deprived of the pleasure of whisking us and our baggage to such halls of luxury. The situation is not much better when we get outside, except that there is more room in which to dodge about, for we are beset by a crowd of hatless young men in well-laundered shirts who are very, very willing to help us with so small a quantity of baggage.

The Venice of our dreams is beginning to come up against reality; our days of courtship from afar are over, for we have met Venice at last, even though we have been introduced to her from behind.





## Entry by Road

THE entry by train into Venice is quite a pleasant experience, and though we might have wished to approach in a more leisurely fashion by steamer from Fusina or Chioggia—or even from our private yacht if we had one—the majority of people come over the causeway. The train, however, is not the only way, for parallel with the railway line is the motor road, so that it is possible to bring a car right into Venice. This latter method has a peculiar character of its own, and at the risk of delay I think it deserves some notice, if only to emphasize the contrast between the twentieth century and the remains of past centuries, with which we live when we reach Venice. We are most of us in some measure sufficiently accustomed to railways to overlook the row of scars they have left on the countryside, but the acute modernity of the *auto-strada* from Padua to Mestre must come somewhat as a surprise even to the hardened motorist. Living as we do in a violent age, we cannot hope to leave it except by violent means: and along the *auto-strada* we are, quite frankly, *projected* from the twentieth century, and come, limp and exhausted, upon a scene of comparative tranquillity where little has changed since the eighteenth.

In the past, trade and commerce were kept in their places as rather sordid adjuncts to elegant living, but today we seem to care little for elegance but only for selling commodities to each other; we seem to have lost the desire to see either nature or architecture unadorned by advertisements. Thus, as no century but ours could have created a Piccadilly Circus—where people make pilgrimages to see advertisements in neon tubes and stand for hours enraptured before them—no century but ours could have created a road like the *auto-strada* from Padua to Mestre. If we were to sit down and deliberately devise the quintessence of the motor age we could not do it more perfectly than it has been done here, though doubtless, as our cities change and we build new ones, there will be further developments.

Mile after mile of concrete has been laid in a perfectly straight line

across the countryside, regardless of any features that may have been underneath, and now it is possible to dash at high speed into Venice, as though Venice, having been there for so long, couldn't wait a little longer. People arrive breathless and hot and almost fall into the Grand Canal with haste. (This method of arrival certainly pleases the hotels and the porters—for the greater the speed with which you arrive the more money you will almost certainly possess!) But it is not so much the factor of speed which gives the *auto-strada* its character, as the way the verges of the road are used to display advertisements. For, as though the makers and masters of the twentieth century were afraid to let us go, they give us a concentrated dose of propaganda, and every ten yards, without exception, on either side of the road, for all those long and boring miles, are arranged huge hoardings with brightly coloured advertisements for canned foods, machine oils, corsetry, beauty aids, toothpastes, sedatives, laxatives, patent medicines, spare parts, typewriters, sewing machines and every conceivable blessing bestowed upon us by the ant-heaps of modern industry. So as not to hurt the eyes, the hoardings are considerably arranged at angles, but are arranged so cleverly that no sooner has one message reached the brain than another one strikes it. They play little games among themselves, such as when they spell out a mystic name letter by letter over a quarter of a mile, and then give the complete answer in one glorious splash of colour, with a kind of bright chuckle and a picture of a huge set of cleaned teeth. And then, to further intrigue the eyes—for monotony is anathema to advertising—we are favoured by ten-foot lettering across a bridge, or, if any house had the misfortune to have been standing there when the concrete was laid, it has now become covered with placards and posters on every possible angle and surface, so that if you lived there you would look out of the windows in the middle of an enormous face, or become a little figure peeping round a huge letter, or else coincide exactly with the end of a huge tube of toothpaste and look as though you were being squeezed out. In such a setting there never was a greater excuse for speed, and it is like running down an endless brightly coloured paper alley, from which there is no escape whatsoever, no blinking from side to side—it is impossible to see the landscape, anyway, so cleverly are the intervals of the advertisements arranged—and we sit enclosed in a tin box in upholstered comfort, in a state of almost trance-like fascination, usually to the accompaniment of

blaring music from a hidden radio. Not content with this fine spectacle of advertisements—which some wag in London called “the art galleries of the people”—each motor car or autobus is required to pay an entrance fee, and at either end is a toll gate with a commissionaire.

As the trains are welcomed by a modern and up-to-date station, all motor traffic congregates in a modern square called the Piazzale Roma. In this outpost of the twentieth century are examples of typical bus and coach stop architecture, the universal architecture of the petrol age, the same to be found at the Coach Station in Victoria or over the whole planet wherever the petrol engine has penetrated. It is surely the drabest style ever evolved by man, utterly without character, mechanics' architecture, yet the first really honest universal style that has in no way relied on revivals from previous ages. Though at St. Pancras or Euston we might be forgiven for thinking we were about to enter a Gothic cathedral or a Greek temple, at the Piazzale Roma there is no doubt at all that we have either come out of a motor car or are just about to get into one. The Piazzale Roma, though actually in Venice, is one of the ugliest squares in the world, and this is the main architectural contribution of our century to the glories of Venice. One thing at least we must be thankful for, that here all motor vehicles must remain. They can go no farther. By a glorious accident of history the streets of Venice are paved with neither gold nor stones but awash with sea-water, and thus Venice has unwittingly beaten the motor car. In the Piazzale Roma there is a gargantuan garage of many storeys, built to receive all incoming cars which are driven up spiral ramps as into an enormous shell. And here they must stay until it is time to reclaim them. (On the return journey along the *auto-strada* it will be discovered that the advertisements are on *both* sides of the hoardings, thus saving space and creating efficiency, as well as reminding the motorists that they are again back in their own century.) Once in the car park, all wants are catered for: an hotel is phoned, a lift—called by some an *elevator*—works down the centre of the building, porters hand the baggage into waiting gondolas, and the visitors are rowed away, somewhat astonished, from the sights of the twentieth century into a city where little has been added for two hundred years. . . . How very helpless a motorist must feel when he first steps into a gondola!

## THE LION AND THE PEACOCK

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THE first and quite overwhelming impression on entering Venice is that life slows down. Everything becomes leisurely. There is no need to hurry at all. It is as though the clock were put back a generation or two, and we glide over the lapping and gently moving waters as our grandfathers must have done. I choose this period deliberately, for on first arrival there is a distinctly Edwardian atmosphere about Venice, an impression which slowly fades as we get to know her better. Later we come to realize the peculiar timelessness of Venice, which enables us to drift up and down history through the medium of her buildings and works of art: superficially she has about her the qualities we associate with the Edwardian era, an atmosphere of old-fashioned gaiety, at once modern and yet belonging slightly to the past. The public steamboats which ply up and down the Grand Canal, as well as the host of other kinds of water traffic, create for an Englishman the feeling of a regatta on the Thames. It is like arriving in the middle of a permanent holiday.

The little steamboats—water buses they are—chug from side to side of the Grand Canal. They lazily approach and bump the landing stages, exchange passengers and leave again with a quiet, homely patience. They glide past the scores of palaces that line the waterway, down past the markets and under the big arch of the Rialto Bridge, then round the bend and under the Japanese-garden-bridge at the Accademia, along to the great white ornament of Santa Maria della Salute—which always seems to be leaning backwards from the water or slightly swaying—thence to San Marco. Gay and bright in holiday clothes, crowds of people stroll along the quayside and through the Piazzetta and the Piazza; the air is full of the fluttering wings of pigeons, throbbing with the music of the great bells and sweet with the strains of the string orchestras playing sentimental Austrian tunes. . . . Irresistibly the flavour of another age steals over us, the days of straw hats, bustles and parasols, the last few years before the petrol age. Slowly we realize what it is that is creating this feeling: there are no motor cars, no traffic, no advertisements! People are simply strolling about, quite at random, in any direction they please, singly or in groups, or, merely standing still if they so desire, in the middle of everything, looking at nothing in particular, unless it be a statue on a parapet or an angel against the sky. . . .

Do not come to Venice if you are pressed for time.







## Hotels and Tourists

THE scene on the Riva degli Schiavoni in the late afternoon is always one of great animation. Through the Canale della Grazia, one of the water gates to Venice, the steamboats are bringing in their loads from the islands, and every now and then the hooters split the air with shrieks of delight. As the boats near the quaysides it might be thought that they were carrying choirs, for they are full of children returning from schools or from some bathing haunt and singing at the tops of their voices in the high-pitched way so characteristic of Italian children. Nuns, oddly dressed shepherdesses, lead their flocks off the boat, and, with great confusion, get them past the ice-cream barrow and through the *sottoportico* on their way to San Zaccaria. Gondolas ride at anchor, patiently waiting for moonlight, while speedboats bounce and splash along the surface of the water on their way to the evening races up the Grand Canal. A long, low-lying cargo boat, with brilliant patches of red lead upon her side, makes her way slowly from the docks out to sea. In the background is the Island of San Giorgio Maggiore, white and pink, with its green dome clear and sharp in the evening light. There is the endless parade of people in front of us, walking backwards and forwards along the waterfront, and at the café tables crowds of visitors are busy with ice-creams and brightly coloured drinks, cups of coffee, and tea, which is served here with some degree of accuracy.

Along the Riva are some of the more expensive hotels in Venice, and all day long, groups of tourists arrive from the Piazzale Roma or the station. As the laden gondolas draw in to the quayside a whistle blows, and young men clothed in white with golden epaulettes, slaves of the hotel foyers, rush out to meet them. The whistle blows again, and baggage slaves, old men with white bristles on their faces, dressed in humiliating French-blue overalls with aluminium stamped name-plates on their caps, break loose from a huddled group of porters waiting for the call. They seize the heavy loads with eagerness, and then, groaning and resigned, hump the suitcases, trunks and hat-boxes in procession through the crowd of

ice-cream and balloon sellers, idlers, urchins and strollers, and past the crowded café tables. The owners of this impressive baggage, having received the final salutations of the gondoliers, take up the rear of the procession, rather self-consciously—assuming an air of nonchalance which deceives nobody except themselves—soberly dressed in their travelling clothes: suits somewhat overpressed, the ladies sporting international travelling hats. But, as their baggage, so carefully emblazoned with all the heraldry of the *Grands Hôtels de l'Europe*, is the only familiar sight in Venice so far, they follow it, rather helplessly, occasionally stealing a sideways glance at the frontage of their new hotel. The troupe of slaves lead the way, and the procession is last seen disappearing into a softly lit interior, glittering with gold, sparkling with chandeliers and littered with glossy magazines arranged in fans upon shiny table tops. . . .

In these marble halls, in that naked expensive modern style where so much emphasis is placed on the beauty of unadorned flat materials arranged in slabs, or in the seductively renovated, seductively lit old palaces (where so much emphasis was placed on adorning already elaborately shaped surfaces) these visitors move around in a make-believe world like princes and princesses. For that, indeed, is what the luxury tourists in Venice have become. This is an extension into real life of film romanticism: you are directed, produced and presented by a system which is easy, glamorous and very pleasant, with backcloths, settings and lighting the like of which are not to be found anywhere else in Europe. In this sumptuous atmosphere, constantly irradiated with electric lights day and night, with the vision somewhat out of focus, we must presume that the visitors retire to intimate quilted chambers, to beds as soft as summer clouds, to perfumed baths, with gilded consoles laden with gladioli (which are in season at this time), and ivory telephones hidden in settecento lacquer cabinets, and with slaves of every description—Negro and Chinese as well as beautiful Italians—who are only too pleased to feel the tingle of an electric bell down their spines, who will rush about tirelessly and noiselessly with luxurious food and drinks in between meals. It is a world of sophisticated behaviour, where everything is possible, where the outrageous and exorbitant become normal, where all the whims of human nature—which would be tolerated normally only in the sick-room and the nursery—are gratified and even encouraged, and where life is very pleasant, dreamy and absurd. (I spent a whole evening in the Danielli a little

while ago with an American acquaintance who for hours tormented the information clerks with exhaustive enquiries about plane services from Venice to Switzerland because he wanted to buy a cuckoo clock. They played the game with straight faces, flicking through timetables and brochures, entering into the fantasy of the whole thing as part of normal life, exactly as in dreams.)

The habits of the luxury tourists are less subtly changed than the habits of the humbler type in Venice, for, apart from their occasional outings by gondola, they seem to be quite satisfied with the charms of their wonderful hotels: for what can life hold of equal splendour? Venice forms but another background to a world tour from one grand hotel to another, carried out rather like the great perambulations of princes from court to court during the Renaissance—except that in those days there were so many retainers in the entourage that they usually left the countryside impoverished and bereft of singing birds, while today the wealthy are encouraged to leave behind a fragment of their fortunes—where they pass, anonymously, through the real world, cushioned and protected by the glamour of their existence from the stern realities of the century. Occasionally they stroll on foot to make an expensive purchase in the Piazza San Marco, or cross the Grand Canal in a gondola for a thousand lire (they could do the same for ten at the ferry) to buy a piece of exotic glass or an antique, or else issue from their hotels to glance dumbly at the knobbly front of the San Moisè on their way to the night club or to those one or two smart bars which remind them so much of London or New York. These modern bars, which make them feel at home, are a kind of bohemian version of the grander modernism of the hotels, where they can relax over gin, whisky and international cocktails and burst out into noisy gossip, away from the quiet dignity and ceremonial of hotel life. Even though these bars are in the little informal alleys, how remote they really are, part of the unreality of Venice, Venice masked for the festa. . . .

The great triumph of the luxury tourists occurs after dark. The dream spreads outwards from the hotels and drifts about the canals like a pleasant apparition. A piece of the film breaks loose, and for an hour or two we keep catching glimpses of it slipping under bridges or at the end of alleys, or we hear, above the normal noise of Italian night life in the streets, strains of the sound track playing the familiar sweet tunes. Every night the gondoliers mass their

black swans outside the bright crystal doors of the hotels. The boats are trimmed with paper lanterns (little concertinas of coloured paper with flickering candles inside) or, on certain occasions, with boughs of leaves in arches, over the velyet cushions. Soon, with unsmiling faces—stilled by the trance of luxury—the procession of spotlessly clad, middle-aged business men and their wives embarks. The gondoliers break out into the well-known songs, perhaps with guitar or other musical accompaniment, and then glide mockingly away with their precious cargo and with a great show of synthetic romanticism. These large flotillas, of eight to ten gondolas, all full of people who apparently enjoy their romance in herd formation, as in the warm intimacy of a crowded cinema, make their way slowly up the Grand Canal and then along the side canals up the well-known processional route. The gondoliers sing, the lanterns sway, and wrapped in each other's arms or sitting hip to hip upon the cushions, the occupants glide through Venice in complete silence, a silence at once extraordinary and embarrassing, as though we on the bridges were possessed of the gift of seeing the faces of people wracked by private ecstasy in the middle of a film. And yet at the same time they are the actors and actresses in the film and we are the audience: for the Venetians succeed where Hollywood has failed for thirty years, and they are staging, for the benefit of wealthy tourists flatteringly elected to play the leading rôles, a film version of Venetian life, or, rather, what the Venetians think is expected of them. The truth seems to be that this version as presented and directed by the Venetians is very much better than ever Hollywood could contrive, for the locale is authentic and the properties genuine. Perhaps this is what the Americans desire of Venice: anyway, they seem extraordinarily pleased with it, and it adds interest to the Venetian evenings. The whole quaint spectacle is somewhat astonishing to English eyes, for we are still a little backward and squeamish about some of the methods of mass exhibitionism beloved of Americans: we are made to feel more than ever like grandparents witnessing the exuberant and, to us, tasteless behaviour of uncontrollable offspring. The world, however, cannot stand still. . . . It all becomes part of the mirage of Venice.

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THE metamorphosis of the humbler tourist is less spectacular, but each in its own degree is full of those curiosities which make foreign

travel a compound of irritation and delight and Venice a place of infinite surprises. I do not propose to mention in great detail the many different kinds of minor hotels and *alberghi*, the majority of which are clean, comfortable and dull, but rather to pick upon one or two that might bring out a certain piquancy, to help me build up the picture of Venice the exotic, and yet not to exaggerate, unless by using some odd image I can express still more the magic of the place. Let us, then, follow the tourist who carries his own baggage, who is somewhat suspicious of porters, or even allergic, as many are in this century, to servants of any kind. He disappears into some shaded doorway in a crowded alley, nearly always surprised at the shabbiness of the place after the glowing name and allurements printed on the letter heading he received in England. . . . Perhaps his hotel turns out to be one of those places where the rooms become cheaper the higher he climbs: until, if he were prepared to sleep on the roof he could do so for practically nothing (services and taxes included). . . . It would sport a slightly attractive entrance, perhaps with a mirror, or a chair or two upon which nobody ever sits, and then a flight of stairs up to the office of the *padrone*. This gentleman, pale through living in one room for thirty years, is nearly always asleep on his couch. A great pendulum clock hanging above him is ticking away the hours of his imprisonment; the eagle carved in walnut hovering upon its pediment is waiting for carrion. His room is stacked with ledgers, police forms for the tourists, and has a telephone with a mouthpiece like a black daffodil and a little starting handle. . . . Upon his desk will be seen stacks of that so familiar and glamorous notepaper: this is where it came from, and it has brought a man a thousand miles, back to Venice.

From this office radiates a gloomy labyrinth of staircases and corridors, hanging with twenty-five-watt bulbs and decorated with posters of last year's festivals. The rooms at first look dreadfully gloomy, for they are always left in total darkness until the new occupant arrives. They seem to sleep between visits, and each new tourist brings a new day. The homely fat lady, dressed in conventional black with a white apron, who knows the mysterious arrangement of all the furniture in every hole in the labyrinth, now makes her way across the sleeping room and throws open the rattling shutters, announcing in triumph, "Ecco Venezia!"—much in the same way as the cab driver used to announce the glories of Rome

in the last century. Suddenly, in rush an alarming noise from below and blinding sunshine from above. There is either a view of the narrow street with its procession of people seen from above, a view of the rooms opposite, or the well in between four walls draped with washing hanging on sticks like sad pennants, or else, if luck will have it, a truly magnificent view of the Basilica of St. Mark with its colourful parade of pigeons and people in the Piazza. Such rooms will have red damask wallpaper, or dark brown, perhaps with late nineteenth-century oleographs upon them of Italian rustics making love under a pergola, or examples of exceedingly ugly wall plaques, in green and caramel pottery, with sea-horses or snakes struggling to free themselves from the prickly background. The beds might be of massive turned mahogany, or massive turned mahogany imitated in cast iron and grained, or else they may be lighter structures painted with swags of roses. (Whatever the design of the beds, it is best to sleep upside down on them, or, to be more explicit, to reverse the pillows so that the head is where the feet usually are. This procedure, which alarms the chambermaid for some days, who tries to make the visitor sleep properly like other people, is due to the fact that the beds have been so well slept in that they slope badly one way, and thus if the weight is reversed the bed usually becomes level again.) The wash bowls in these rooms are usually only supported by the waste pipe and it is safer not to lean upon them; all drawers are difficult to open, and the wardrobes, which have distorting mirrors at the front (as though to mock at you for coming, or to make you part of the mirage of Venetian life), possess rows of forlorn coat hangers left by generations of visitors. Behind the doors are nearly always found those elaborate arrangements of turned mahogany knobs, reminiscent of bagpipes, which are another kind of coat hanger but which nearly always fold up when used, while outside there is a balcony covered with virginia creeper or other climbing plant which straggles along the front of the building.

At one time, when such rooms were furnished, in 1890 or 1900, they must have been modern and smart, and little has been added to them since the day the decorators left. They are truly period pieces, belonging to the Baedeker period of hotel furnishing, and they can be quite charming, especially if well situated; and, as practically everyone concerned with the running of such hotels has long ago lost any interest in efficiency, they can be homely and

private. One could safely die in such rooms without anybody being the wiser. . . . However, for those who prefer something a little more recent there are the many hotels furnished and decorated during the Oatmeal Period, twenty or thirty years ago, when the walls were uncompromisingly distempered and the rooms provided with simple box-like furniture in ginger pine, rooms clean and characterless but hateful to live in for long, prepared as though to receive a hospital patient. Then there are the many examples of excellent small hotels, which reflect, like distant cousins, some of the glamour of the grand hotels, which ape in miniature the features and manners of their betters, with a display of glittering lights, awkward upward-shooting sprays of gladioli, carpeted floors and staircases, a liberal supply of magazines and deep square chairs, and a few odd panels—small and second-rate—of mosaic or engraved glass to add the spice of modern art. In fact, there is little that Venice does not know about hotels, and it is wise never to remain long in one place, if only to discover a better one or one equally surprising in a completely different way.

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THE tourists quickly shed their travelling caterpillar clothes, and then emerge into the streets as butterflies, resplendent in gay dresses and bright shirts. They become the owners of one of the innumerable designs of straw hats, from sober panama and orange-coloured topee to variegated Mexican styles; and then, if they have not already done so, they cover their eyes with dark glasses, so that the Venetian scene—so gay and colourful—is reduced to the greyness of a winter's day or, what is more extraordinary, is seen through green glass, so that it looks like a rather unconventional scene on the ocean bed. A desire common to nearly all on arrival is to shed as much clothing as possible in the heat, so that, unlike Arab countries, where people seem to go muffled in bedding, there is a constant display of arms and legs—white legs for the sun to scorch and white arms to bump up against in the crowded alleys. (This phenomenon, peculiar to our own times, has occasioned the Church to adopt a slightly modified view towards nakedness, but still it is difficult and by no means easy to enter a church half-naked, and has given rise to new functions for the beadle at the door and a new occupation to old ladies who are shocked at the spectacle, as well as to a new problem of behaviour, for it is now decreed that men's arms and boys'

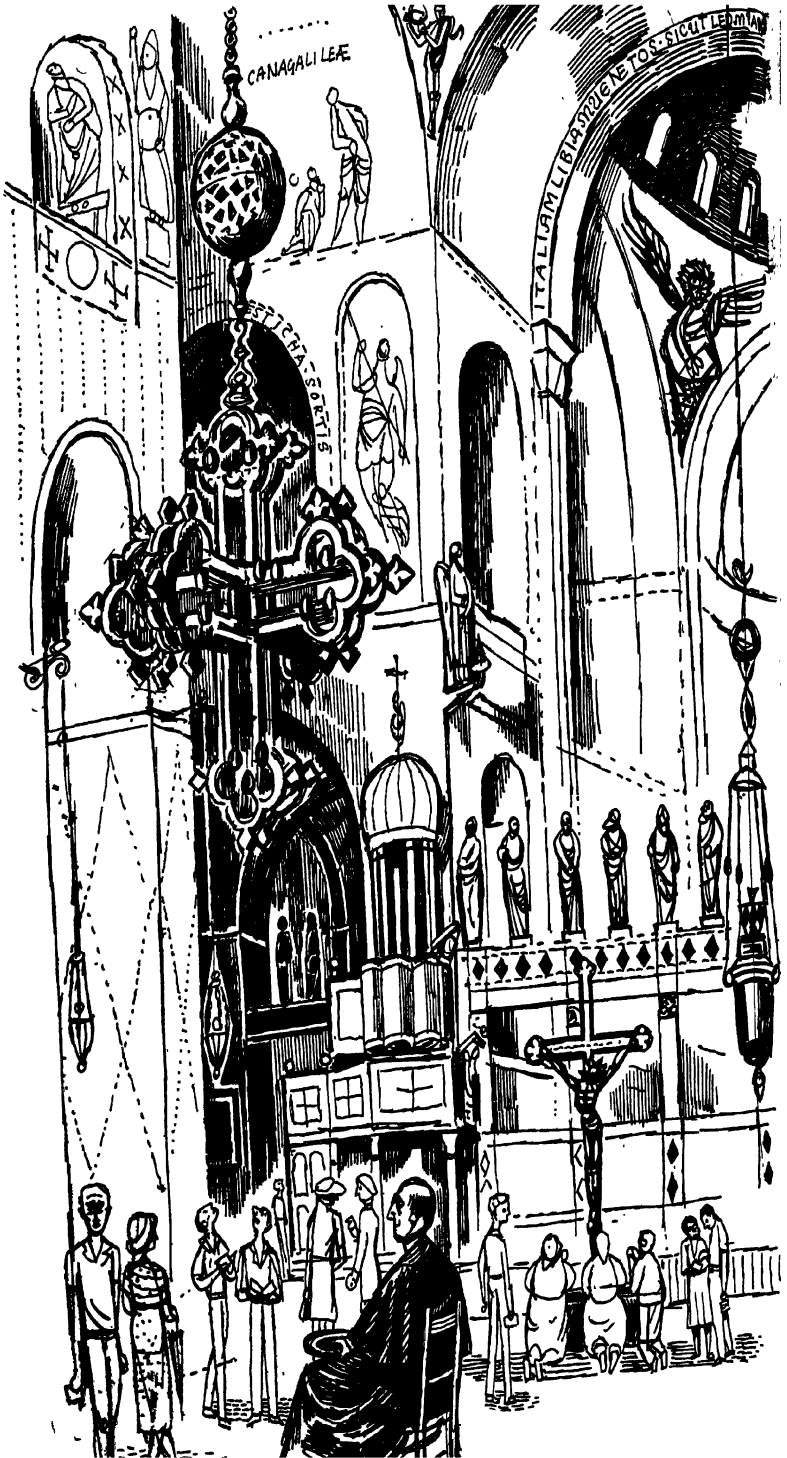


legs may visit a church, but men's legs and women's arms are considered unduly seductive and must be draped. . . .) It is odd, however, to see a tourist issue nonchalantly from the portal of his hotel dressed in a most violently coloured coat-shirt, with a design of arum lilies or South American jungle flowers all over it, with his legs quite naked, except for sandals, as though he had come out of his bathroom and forgotten to put his trousers on. . . . But still, personally, I am in favour of as much nakedness as possible, providing that, after a certain age, a little discretion is exercised. . . .

No sooner does the tourist emerge into the teeming streets, glancing this way and that, clutching a map, a guide-book and camera, than he is set upon by all manner of people who want to relieve him of money. . . . First the man who advances with a tray of postcards, who performs tricks with folding views of Venice, concertina-like, long enough to make Christmas festoons; wadges of cards, coloured, uncoloured, good and bad; masses of guide-books in all European languages, and maps galore—from those which have little pictures on them of the sights, which are quite useless; maps of Venice which have been very freely rendered by cartographers' assistants in the back-alley printing works of Venice, Padua and Milan; to really good maps of Venice which have the streets, squares, canals and bridges drawn in the right proportions. Next comes the man with the white cloth cap and black alpaca coat who appears, at first, to have unusually gaudy sleeves like a mandarin, but who, on a closer look, is seen to be draped with scores of cheap and charming glass necklaces, and with him another man who advances with a little, well-made box of shallow drawers, to show you, not his collection of beetles, but trays of cameos and mosaic and glass brooches. Then whispering into your ear as you pass the street corner is the man who can change your money, or those sirens who will oblige by introducing you to the many shady pleasures of Venice. And the young men who seem to conjure an inexhaustible supply of American cigarettes out of their pockets, and their brother conjurors who keep extremely large and glittering wrist-watches up their sleeves, watches so elaborate that you could time a split-second bombardment or easily judge the winner of a car race. Then the bright-eyed, bright-shirted youths who will take you rowing, at your expense, or show you Venice, or drink a beer with you if you'll pay for it, or who will become your bosom friend for the evening, or take you to visit their favourite gondolier, or

any manner of thing, whatever will best cater for the pleasure of your stay in Venice. Finally, the people who live in the Piazza San Marco—the plague of photographers, the bird-seed men, the flower sellers; and those others, usually most deserving, who are hungry, envious and maddened by shortages, who yet somehow remain cheerful and proud—the scores of adolescents condemned to a life of idleness through unemployment, who come from the prolific families of the outer districts of Venice to live a Tantalus-existence among the fashionable crowds of the Piazza.

Today there is another class of tourist more peculiar to our time, tourists who do not effect a metamorphosis because they have nothing to change into—the brave young people in their 'teens and early twenties, who have come to Venice from all over Europe by a hundred ways, on foot, on bicycles, hitch-hiking—students, schoolboys and schoolgirls, ready for summer adventures away from home and young enough to endure the hardships of a passage across Europe on very little money. They too see a side of Venice that the rest don't see, but one thing is sure: that they enjoy every hour of their stay, judging by their eyes, their ceaseless activity, their talk. These young people—the lanky English schoolboys, the vociferous French, the serious Scandinavians, the younger generation of blond young men from Austria in those incredibly dirty leather shorts—are the great tower climbers, the great picture-gallery-goers, the great Lido-swimmers, braving the heat of the day and needing no siesta (as they will in twenty years' time!). On the Island of the Giudecca is a youth hostel, another in the artists' quarter of the Zattere, another at the University. (The workmen, the artists, the educationalists and the youth of all nations: do they not always appear together—the labourers, the dreamers, the idealists?) It is perhaps unfortunate for young people in Venice that they are at an age when they have the least money and the greatest appetites, but they make up in ebullience for what they cannot eat of expensive foods. At the end of the day they can eat together of quite wholesome though roughly served food in that communal restaurant not far from the Rialto Bridge where they can get a meal for a tenth of the price they would have to pay around San Marco, or else they can eat in those down-to-earth, virile, noisy sailors' *trattorie* on the Giudecca, with the luxury lights twinkling across the water. . . . And if they cannot sleep in a proper bed there is always the bottom of a barge for a night or two.



## *Piazza San Marco*

THE only time of the day when the Piazza San Marco wears an air of innocence is round about four o'clock in the morning. The dawns in Venice at this time of the year are unbelievably pure, the air is fresh and clear and sweet-smelling, and the whole of the sky is a soft pink which turns the buildings a pale lemon yellow. The squares are deserted and quiet, except for the murmuring of the pigeons that nestle with the saints and angels under the canopies of St. Mark's and sit drowsily in neat rows among the richly encrusted Byzantine ornaments. In front of me is the low fountain in the Piazzetta dei Leoncini bubbling up from the marble pavement like a spring, and beyond, the rows of arcades, absolutely deserted. All hint of revelry, of parading and showing-off that were here but a few hours ago are gone. The musicians are safely snoring in their beds, the instruments are muffled in Florian's and Quadri's. Vanity, the only one in Venice who has the gift of eternal youth, is sleeping elsewhere, renewing herself for another long day. For a few hours there is only the murmuring of the pigeons and this incomparable stage-set suffused with pink light.

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BY nine o'clock the scene has changed to one of bustle. The pigeons are busily washing themselves, preening themselves and having their early sips of water at the fountain. They paddle into the shallow pool a dozen at a time, drink, bob and flutter, come out, shake their feet, stretch their wings, straighten their tail feathers and then, bright-eyed and cheerful, wheel away into the Piazza to start another day of gorging bird-seed. The Piazza is quite unimaginable without these gay little creatures strutting about in their immaculate grey, pecking, bowing to each other, courting and murmuring, good mannered and bright. They live a most elegant life, completely free from worries, supported on the rates in a kind of welfare state of their own, with free access above to Byzantium, and gay cosmopolitan society below.

As the sun sweeps over the Piazza the shutters begin to go up in the cool of the arcades and the shops reveal their glittering merchandise. There is a scraping of hundreds of chairs and tables, and a flicking of cloths as the waiters prepare the cafés for the never-failing supply of visitors; and the musicians somewhat wearily uncover their instruments, their hair freshly brilliantined, for another non-stop session of sweet music that continues from mid-morning till midnight throughout the season. The early camera-clickers are out, though the clicking has not yet reached the intensity that it will in a few hours' time, and the tourists begin to appear, their faces shining with delight at being in the Piazza San Marco so early in the morning instead of being in office, factory or schoolroom. At nine o'clock the great bells of the Campanile begin to sway, and soon the whole square vibrates with overwhelming melodious noise—and the day has officially begun.

Round about this time, which is the time when Americans seem to be well under way (Europeans seem to start somewhat later), the tourist bureaux are crowded with people demanding information about their next buses and trains to all parts of Italy or possibly the world. Queuing is an English virtue, one of our latest additions to centuries of virtue!—but the enthusiasm for it is shared by no other race, except when they are reduced by starvation to bread queues. So that to visit an international tourist bureau in Venice when it is crowded, between nine and ten, demands infinite patience and stamina and tactics more appropriate to the football field. It has become the mode that one assumes one is there alone, and that the only information of any importance to be given on that day is the information about one's own journey: thus, amid scenes of unparalleled bad manners, people who would otherwise behave quite courteously extract knowledge from the tortured and harassed men behind the counter. It is once more, I believe, the mania for speed that causes people to suddenly behave like lunatics, as though every plane, train, boat or bus were about to rush away without them, leaving them in a forlorn stationary position when they should be hurtling away to another part of the globe. I always marvel at the patience of the men behind the counter—though they are less patient in Italy than in England—who spend their lives coping with those terrible time-tables of international travel, who live a dry and complicated fantasy life of world communications and answer the interminable questions of semi-hysterical crowds. All this pushing

and elbowing becomes absurd, because later, round about eleven o'clock or mid-day, the crowd has moved off and the very same information is available in quietness that was available at nine-thirty in pandemonium. Money-changing is the second great adventure of early morning business in the Piazza, but here, in the more solemn atmosphere of the banks, some slight order has been brought into the proceedings, at least behind the grills: we must assume that there is a system, though it is a mysterious one, and the crowd never quite believes that it is being properly treated. Here are relinquished neat travellers' cheques for fistsful of variegated banknotes. We catch a glimpse of other people's money systems and subconsciously note the different designs on travellers' cheques. Ours are neat and so are the Americans', the Germans' are over-designed, the French ones are huge like school diplomas, and the Egyptian ones simply bewildering. The process of reduction to Italian currency is done by turning a mysterious handle on an adding machine (which we trust is reliable) and the little slip is then passed to the cashiers, who have the ability to count milliards of lire in what must be the most musical set of numerals in the world. So fond are they of counting that they have an odd method of duplicating, which involves repeating the same numeral twice straight off, a kind of numerical stammer accompanied, of course, by grandiose flicking of the notes and banging of rubber stamps.

By the time the banknotes are sorted and stowed away the Piazza will have miraculously filled with people, and the pigeons will be gorging themselves. There is one thing about the crowd in the Piazza which distinguishes it from all other crowds—it is always well washed, colourful, happy, immaculate and at the same time overcome by a desire to have itself photographed. Our ancestors—for who except the Scots would not claim some connection with the civilization of the Mediterranean?—have provided an incomparable background against which to be photographed, and everyone here suddenly realizes that he is twice as attractive as he thought he was when he glanced into his hotel mirror, and thinks, in his new-found self-appreciation, that the ornate façade of St. Mark's is a background of suitable splendour. The curious thing is that people do look good when they are in the Piazza San Marco, which points to the value of a fine architectural setting. It is possible to sit here and count more good-looking people passing by than anywhere else in the world. We are astonished at the beauty of the

human race, and marvel at the mysterious qualities of an architecture which has for close on a thousand years formed a background for a hundred radical changes of fashion. So fine and so subtle is the interplay between columns and spaces, between archways and crockets, between pinnacles and domes that quite ordinary people like ourselves are somehow flattered and made intensely aware of the importance of our bodies, the way we dress them and the way we stroll them along. Everyone takes an interest in turn-out, to be in harmony with the setting. Slovenliness is banished like a fiend, for everyone knows that the moment he sets foot in the Piazza San Marco he is on the stage and that he is taking part in the greatest parade on earth. We are at once the actors and the audience, we are anonymous and yet important. Friend meets friend and is immediately astonished at the transformation. People fall to knocking years off their ages, men hitherto taciturn become gallant, the ladies coquettish, for the Piazza San Marco is the parade of the youth of all ages. Such is the power of Venetian architecture, a lesson to all builders of cities in the future. . . .

The professional photographers, though they have not been allowed to build booths, have nevertheless taken permanent possession of one or two flagstones, and they encamp with tripods, black hoods, boxes of plates and sun helmets. About these gentlemen with their little black tents there is an old-fashioned air, so much more leisurely are they, so much less frightening than the slick young men who wield their modern cameras like weapons, who take one so by surprise that they might as well be using water-pistols for the nervousness they create. Besides, with the older method one has more time to collect one's wits and think of one's best poses; the other way is far too candid and only creates an agony of suspense until one sees the prints. To the professionals in the Piazza falls the task of photographing the larger squads of tourists. Rubicund and rosy Swiss will be lined up in rows, the ladies in front, the giants behind, all giggling happily and blinking in the sun. They will be provided with corn by the photographer's bird-seed assistant, scattered on hands and arms and hair like confetti, and then, with the happy domes of the Basilica bobbing up behind them, they will be snapped under a cloud of fluttering pigeons. Meanwhile, as every tourist these days carries a camera, the private photographers go around seriously or semi-seriously snipping and snapping everywhere. If the Piazza San Marco were to dissolve tomorrow—which

it might well do, for is it not a mirage?—it could be reconstructed in every detail without the slightest difficulty from the millions of photographs taken in any one season.

The morning crowds quickly swarm into the Palazzo Ducale or else into the Basilica. On a fine day the Staircase of the Giants is thronged with visitors, once more snipping and snapping their way into the palace. The courtyard of the palace is a moving mass of amateur photographers, crouching and peering at all angles, swarming around the two over-ornamented bronze well-heads, and adjusting their exposure meters under the arcades. Here let me interpose and tell how I was prevented from drawing in this courtyard by one of those fussy little officials. Why could I not sit down and draw if so many were allowed to photograph, I asked? And though I already knew the answer, it was nice to hear him say that there were too many of them and only a few left of us. So if you enter the stream of photographers you are free to record what you please, but if you are merely an artist you must first obtain a permit. The artist is here, in Venice of all places, completely vanquished by the camera! Such has been the ironical course of history.

You will gather from all this that around San Marco there takes place an orgy of photographing, and I fear that that is so: it is the only fitting description that in any way approaches the truth. People even take moving pictures of static architecture. But let us not dwell too long on this modern phenomenon which makes all tourism in Italy so selfconscious, so frequently embarrassing, and state, here and now, that the splendour of the Piazza quite overwhelms the antics of the tourists. Walk to the far end of the Piazza and the crowd becomes a mass of small points of gay colour, surrounded on all sides by palaces, with the trance-inducing avenues of identical arches and windows, balustrades and parapets, the dominating sheer brick of the Campanile on the right, the smaller Tower of the Moors on the left, and the exquisite cluster in white and gold and blue of the Basilica in the background.

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VENICE still keeps up the wonderful custom of firing off a cannon at mid-day. We are, as ever, taken by surprise and reminded by the shock that we are getting hungry. The sun is at its zenith, the heat is at its greatest and fresh breezes are coming in from the Adriatic. The cannon also takes the pigeons by surprise, for they suddenly



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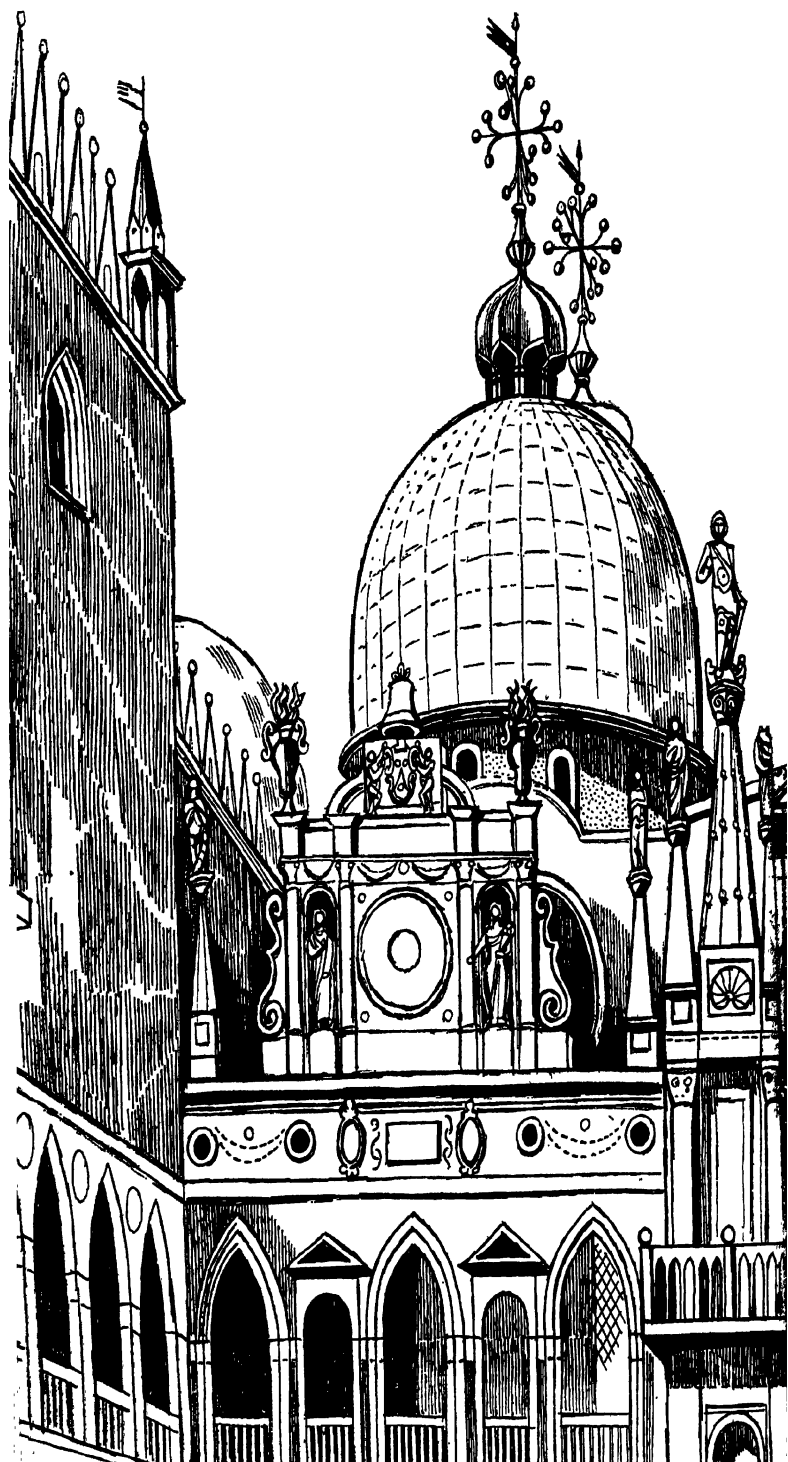
rise and rush overhead in a great circle and then settle down again. It is also a signal for all the clocks and bells in the Piazza to start up as though the explosion were the turning of the key in the lid of a giant musical box, and now, one after the other, they begin to perform and jangle, to boom and bounce, until the whole square is drenched and shuddering with delightful noise. The signal is taken up by scores of other churches, first the bells of the Salute just across the canal, and then by campanile after campanile, until the whole of Venice at noonday is an island of ringing bells in the middle of the sea. I am not a church-bell hater; indeed, I do not know how anybody could hate the bells of St. Mark's. In England, where we make our bells play tunes—often rather doleful hymns—we have a tendency to become caught up in certain literary and emotional associations at times of the day when we least expect to, but in Venice—indeed, wherever I have been in Italy—bells seem to be enjoyed for their delightful noise alone. As though the noise in the streets—the healthy human noises of shouting, singing, quarrelling and endless talking—were not enough, the very buildings must join in and release tremendous floods of sound at given points of the day throughout the whole peninsula from the Dolomites to Sicily. Not for the Italians the doleful strains of "Rock of Ages" and such like tunes with all their sombre messages, but great outbursts of joyous tempests of noise to supplement the sunshine and the blue sky. The bells of St. Mark's at the height of the season are an experience to be remembered for ever with affection. England, however, does not score one point, for though we may be treated to tunes during the day, the bells are silent during the night, whereas in Venice the great outbursts continue at their appointed intervals throughout the whole twenty-four hours. This, as can be imagined, has a distressing effect upon visitors to Venice who are not used to such things in the middle of the night, and it is interesting to think of the whole tourist population turning over in their hot beds when the rumpus starts while the Venetians are sleeping soundly. It is possible, however, to learn to sleep through the noise of the bells, though sleep in the vicinity of the Piazza San Marco is a very relative term: so many interesting things happen during the night. . . .

From noon until the hour of siesta is over the Piazza is quieter than during the morning, though it is not entirely deserted. People retire to eat and then, if they are sensible, to rest or sleep for a while. Sleeping on the Basilica is not now encouraged, and anyone who

dozes under the arches is gently winkled out by the police. This must have been upsetting for many people, for cathedrals always have their *habitués*, old men who have slept there for years; and even now one man comes every afternoon to one of the archways in the Piazzetta dei Leoncini and uses a marble column as a pillow. The police are less watchful of the sides of the Basilica than they are of the front. But the most stirring event of this rather torpid interlude takes place soon after two o'clock, when the pigeons are officially fed by the municipal bird-seed man. He scatters grain in front of the Napoleonica, and instantly thousands of pigeons fly down from their perches; the air is full of fluttering wings, the pavement a moving mass of bobbing heads and wanton tails, as noisy and breezy as a summer gale. Any photographers—there are always some—who happen to be straying innocently by at this hour become wonder-struck at such a spectacle, and caught by the hysteria of the fluttering wings are moved to rapid action: the clicking of shutters mingles with the noise of pecking beaks. But soon it is all over, the pavements are picked clean, and the drowsy quiet of the early afternoon settles upon the Piazza. The light is white and brilliant, the heat too much.

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WHEN we enter the Piazza once again, at any time between five and eight o'clock, we go, as it were, to a party. For the whole square, especially in front of the Basilica, is thronged with people in their thinnest, gayest frocks and shirts strolling about and talking at the tops of their voices. The sense of social intercourse, of pleasant gossiping, of mere perambulation is delightful. The air is balmy, as often as not there is a golden and pink sunset, and the feeling of intimacy is enough to make the loneliest hermit relinquish the cave of his own mind for ever. The noise of conversation is deafening, greater in volume than was ever achieved at parties in Chelsea and Hampstead, and, unlike those parties, this is a party where newspapers are freely sold. Under the archway leading to the Merceria, where there is a great confluence of people returning from shop-window gazing, the newsboys, old and young, cry out, with extraordinarily well-developed and powerful voices, the names of the evening papers, announcing every day, like the messengers from hell, the dreadful things that are happening in the world outside—the latest *cataclismo*, *crisi*, *disastro*, *assassino*. . . . Or they announce, more to the liking of the Venetians, the latest sporting results, or the





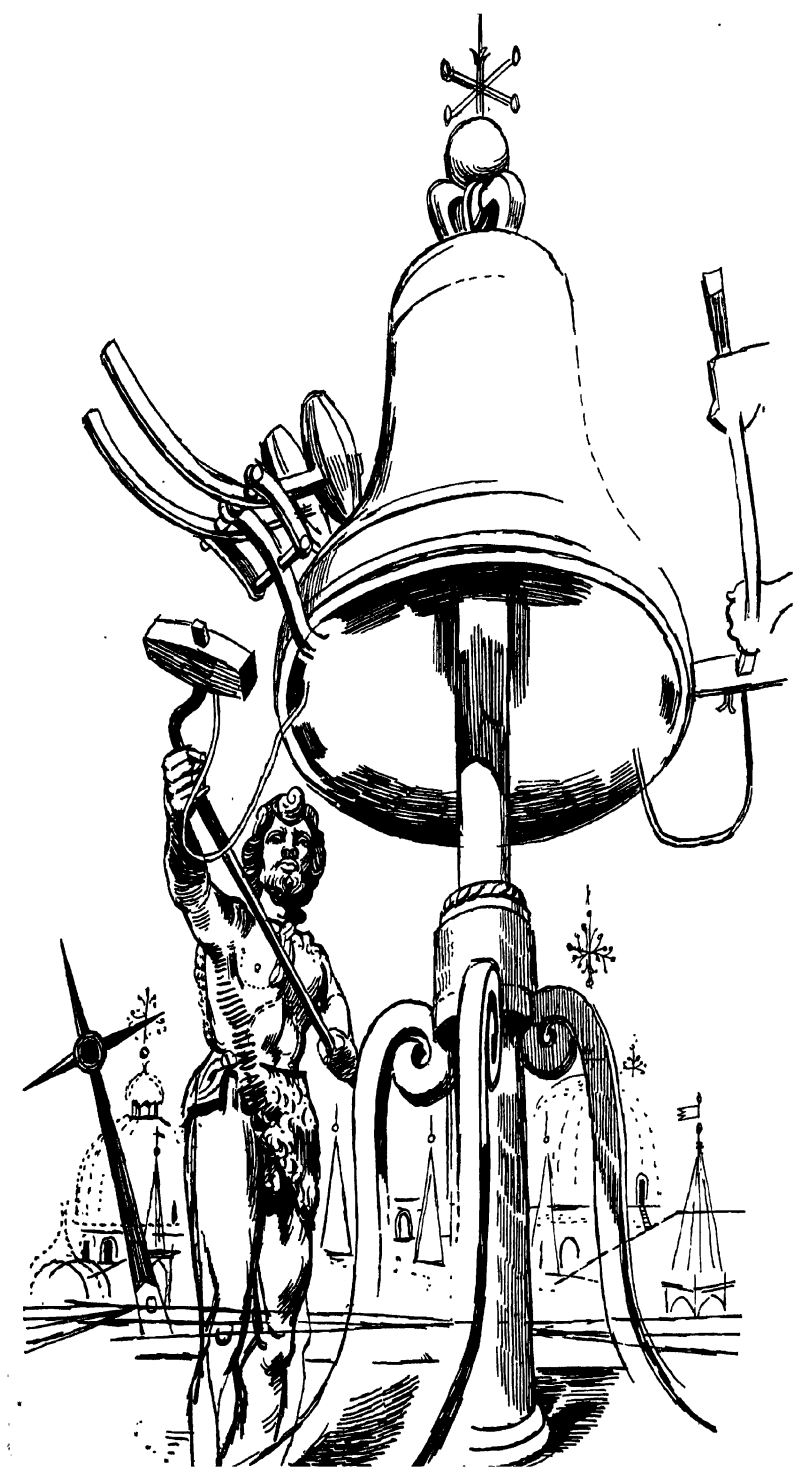
results of those never-ending motor car and cycle races in the Alps which seem to be in progress for every moment the roads are not choked with snow and boulders.

The cafés by now are full of people sipping coffee, Americanos, or *siroppi*, or leisurely eating ice-creams, to the background accompaniment of the music of any of the four orchestras which are playing at the same time. The Piazzetta is a bright parade of lads and lasses walking up and down, up and down from San Marco to the sea, while their elders sit upon the pink marble benches at the foot of the Campanile and perhaps think of their own young days (or more likely talk about the present-day condition of the lira) or sit around the bases of the two Columns. The masts of the yachts sway gently from side to side; the gondolas, with their polished steel plumes flashing in the evening sun, ride up and down like black swans by the Molo, and the gondoliers in full summer dress, stand idly by in groups, or lie, straw hats over their faces, hands behind their heads, on their velvet cushions. Italian sailors stroll among the crowd in pairs, neat figures clad in white and blue, their hats perfectly straight upon their black heads—figures never quite convincing to Englishmen, who are always taken by surprise at the sight of the sailors of other nations. They walk along the Molo and the Riva as though they were still on deck: as though Venice were a large and decorative ship permanently at anchor, open at this season to visitors. Occasionally a pair of them sit astride a marble bench and play a game of draughts with coloured pebbles upon squares that have been deeply scored into the marble by years of usage. Children play their eternal games; mothers dandle babies in those flimsy and flouncy clothes which always make them look so like new Christmas dolls. Spectators stand around the points of interest: everyone takes a keen interest in everybody else with unabashed curiosity. We come to San Marco to stare and be stared at in the friendliest possible way—the Italians gaze with unflagging interest upon the foreigners who come from all parts of the world, the foreigners gaze with astonishment upon the extraordinary scene of Italian life, where the simple pleasures of talking and showing-off are brought to such a fine art. Pride and vanity are fully justified by youth and beauty, and the whole rhythm of Venetian life seems bent to this purpose. There is one youth who comes to the Piazza every day and who wears a little locket pinned on to the breast of his shirt. Inside the locket is a photograph—a photograph of himself. . . .

By seven o'clock the party is in full swing. The Piazza and the Piazzetta are crowded with hundreds of people, and then, as though to mark the climax, the bells start up again. The noise of the bells is blown by the wind away over the roof-tops and lost in the alleyways and the side canals, while below the hubbub intensifies as people gaze in the direction of the two bronze Giants on the roof of the Clock Tower who, with slow deliberation, bang their hammers upon the bell to mark the hour, as they have done with un-failing regularity every day since 1496. Napoleon, who made some telling remarks about Venice, described the Piazza San Marco as "the largest drawing room in Europe," and I would add to this the rider that the Clock Tower is the largest mantelpiece clock in Europe. It is a huge and gaudy toy, in ultramarine and gold, a somewhat muddled piece of popular art, with signs of the Zodiac, seasonal charts, phases of the moon and a panel showing how the sun circles round the earth—a piece of delightful human conceit since unfortunately disproved—all smothered in glittering ornaments and patterns. There are moving panels, which slowly slip into place and give the hour and minute in Roman numerals, a gilded figure of the Madonna in a niche, a gilded Lion of St. Mark, and on the roof the two rugged and rather pleasing Giants, naked except for scanty sheepskins. Clocks, upon which such lavish art and ingenuity have been spent ever since machines were devised to measure time—that most appalling thing in the universe—have always appealed to popular taste, and this clock in Venice has received as much adulation, though in a different sense, as the Basilica itself. Even today the interest is as great as ever, in spite of our modern obsession with other, more infernal machines which can hasten the passage of time much more quickly; and the Venetians regard it with precisely the same love and affection as the family clock. Old men in straw hats and the high, stiff collars of another age adjust gold watches from their embroidered waistcoats, and young people glance appreciatively at their glittering chromium wrist-watches, upon which they can check the events of their lives to the split second at any hour of day or night, to see if the Giants are late.

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THE pink and pale blue of the later afternoon very soon change to tangerine and violet, and then it is that we discover the moon among the golden balls of the crosses of St. Mark's, so clear and





sharp and globular, so intensely yellow against the purple. . . . And then the indigo night, and stars in a flawless sky; and in spite of the hundreds of sentimentalized pictures of Venice by night, we cannot but marvel at this setting where the permanent beauties of nature have been so well appropriated by the Venetians to glorify their own temporary stay on earth. So well planned are the Piazza and the Piazzetta that under all conditions the sea and the sky fit in perfectly—during the day the sea is like a green lawn spreading from a terrace at the end of a vista, and at night the squares become star chambers, with the moon moving along the spiky cresting of the Palazzo Ducale, between the Columns of St. Mark and St. Theodore and behind the row of statues on the Library. It is, indeed, a setting as near to perfection as we can hope to get, and makes us envy the joy of the artists who built it.

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THERE are stars in the sky and jewels in the shops. . . . The arcades are brilliantly lit and the shops are rows of alcoves in a crystal grotto: small shops, lined from floor to ceiling with shelves of glittering things—gilded and silvered glassware from Murano, cases of exotic jewellery, trays of uncut stones of every description, leatherwork stamped with gold and inlaid with colour, festoons of shining printed silks, cobwebs of lace from Burano. . . . Tourists, breathless with excitement, go from shop to shop, astonished as much by the prices as by the display; but still seem to be able to buy from this bazaar, for the shops are always full and little parcels are being wrapped. Venetian shops still retain a curiously oriental flavour about them, especially the shops of the Piazza, though it is more the orientalism of a Christmas pantomime—the western version of Baghdad or the chinoiserie of Aladdin's cave. I should not be in the least surprised to find the shopkeepers in huge jewelled turbans and pointed slippers, or an ebony eunuch walking down the arcade with a golden tray of fruits fashioned from priceless gems upon his head. . . .

Music is provided in the Piazza by three orchestras which play different tunes at the same time. There is a constant intermingling of different kinds of music: of modern jazz tunes, tunes from Old Vienna, Neapolitan tunes, tunes from South America and even tunes from Scotland, so that at one and the same time there might be a samba, "Santa Lucia" and "Auld Lang Syne" striking

the ear. The orchestras, working in the cramped spaces of the arcades in between the busy shops, are open to the endless stream of people. Thus it is possible to be within a foot or two of the musicians, a position much favoured by gangs of Venetian youths for whom this free entertainment comes as a daily palliative against the boredom of unemployment. The arcades are congested and lively and full of rich comedy, but full also of a certain sadness, especially for the musicians, for what a terrible thing it must be to have to play jazz non-stop from morning till night, day after day, smiling all the time! I am full of admiration for these groups of young and not-so-young musicians who provide the Piazza San Marco with its constant background of haunting music: for we never leave Venice without some nostalgic tune ringing in our ears for months to come which conjures up a hundred memories. But over a period of a few years I have watched one or two musicians distinctly change: they get a wild stare—though their teeth still be flashing—and they go pale from being kept out of the sun. One youth whom I noticed for two years, whose job it was to rub two pieces of serrated bone together and shake seeds in a gourd in one of the jazz orchestras, I found wandering disconsolate on the northern *fondamenta* gazing out to sea at the Island of San Michele. His place was taken this year by another young man, gaily rubbing and shaking. Not only do the orchestras play music but there is singing, and it is a lively background they provide to the café life, a constant striving to attract the tourists to sit at the tables, and endless competition between Quadri's and Florian's on opposite sides of the square.

How welcome it is, after hours of wandering—for one cannot parade all the time—to sit at one of the little tables (red for Quadri's, orange for Florian's) and, for the price of a drink, gossip the evening away in as many languages as one commands, or else just to sit alone, pleasantly exhausted, and watch either the antics of the people at the other tables or the rows of people who stand and watch the spectacle of the cafés or listen to the orchestras. Or else, on those special occasions, to ruminate through the noise of the municipal band which struggles, against the hum of conversation, with "Poet and Peasant" or Mozart set for brass and brays its ways for a few hours after the manner of all brass bands in all the parks and squares of Europe. Not only are there constant musical entertainments for the people of the cafés, and the joys of the parade, but a variety of diversions of different kinds. For instance, though at first one is

under the impression that sheet lightning is playing over the Gulf of Venice, one discovers that this is the light from the flash-bulbs of the wandering photographers. These young men, rather earnest and quiet, perhaps thwarted journalists, come upon one unawares and temporarily blind one by their artificial lightning. They leave a little card which says, "Come and admire yourself tomorrow at our studio free of charge," and then pass on, apologetically, to the next table. The greatest plague, simply because I am a professional artist, are those men who come round with infinite cheek and make revolting caricatures of tourists. That they make most sitters look like pigs is probably no accident, for they tour all the restaurants where people are feeding, while but half a mile away others are starving. (But still we bring our money here and we are the greatest industry Venice has in this century.) These men must be trained in some horrid school in Venice, for they all work alike in thick black chalk, and with a few swift strokes produce a picture of a pig which manages, by some sinister means, to resemble the sitter. Then there are the Hungarian astrologers who steal upon one unawares to lure one to their dens. They leave politely printed cards, with a list of the occult sciences in which they are qualified, as do also the graphologists who ask one to scribble a little on their cards to have one's character read—as though one didn't already know by now! Finally there are the one or two sweet old ladies who bring baskets of camellias to pin on the bosom of one's lady friend. They manage to produce an old-world sadness, a kind of Viennese melancholy, and rows of women are left with identical white flowers on their breasts. . . . Their hair is smooth and grey, they dress simply in stockingette and wear buttoned shoes. They are the direct descendants of the flower-girls of the eighteenth century, or else perhaps they are the very same grown old: one can never be quite certain in Venice.

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ILLUMINATIONS have always been a great feature of Venetian life. During celebrations both secular and ecclesiastical the buildings have been transformed by lights into something still more glorious. It has always been difficult to distinguish between the secular and the religious, however, for in no place have things ecclesiastical been so quickly transformed into the secular, and we are not always sure whether we are attending a Christian or a pagan festival. Yet, by

this very method religion is kept alive and satisfies both parties, and today the festivals of Venice, the greatest of which are essentially religious, have become the most famous in Europe. In the past all illuminations were made by the lighting of thousands of candles placed either in lanterns or in glass holders, accompanied then as now by elaborate firework displays on a gigantic scale, as I hope to show elsewhere in this book. Though the era of gaslight seems to have mercifully contributed little to this tradition—or the city would have been blown up long ago—the advent of electricity has helped considerably and, in our own day, by the mere draping of miles of wires about the buildings, illuminations are achieved on a scale undreamt of in past centuries. It is now possible to illuminate the buildings with a far greater range of scenic effects—for instance, with moving colours gradually changing from one to another, with strong colours and soft colours, and with flood-lighting either diffused or particular, or with any of those hundred and one foibles of the electrician, from fairy-lights to searchlights. The results, on the whole, are most successful in spite of the occasional use of shocking colour schemes, and the development of electric illumination has undoubtedly added to the charms of Venice in the tourist season.

Obviously, no greater source for experimenting with floodlighting is to be found than with the Basilica of St. Mark, and the effects of the electrician's art are added to the arts of architecture, sculpture and mosaic, and the result, even though we know by what ordinary means it is done, forms an occasion of great importance in the magical summer entertainments. Thousands of people assemble for this spectacle, and nobody goes away disappointed. A great ramp of seats is erected in front of the Napoleonica, which quickly fills with spectators some two hours before the event. The café tables too are fully occupied, and gradually the remaining part of the Piazza fills up with standing people, until finally there is estimated to be a crowd of some hundred thousand souls, as many as we muster in London in front of Buckingham Palace on great occasions. As nothing is done in Italy without some accompaniment of noise, a full orchestra and choir toil through the evening—listened to for once with comparative respect—in front of the Basilica. From the high seats at the back the musicians and singers, surrounded by the great buildings, look exceedingly small, like toys in evening dress, and from this position the music comes fitfully up the square, swelling and fading on the breeze. Most of it is breathed in by the vast stand-

ing crowd—but at least we are seated, and that fully compensates for the parts of the concert we miss. Standing is the curse of all public spectacles. . . .

Electrical illuminations differ in another respect from all others: they come on suddenly and take us by surprise and they equally quickly go out and leave us bewildered in darkness. Not only that, but it has been my experience that Italian flood-lighting, magnificent when it actually takes place, usually takes a long time to come on. It is often harrowing to be near the electricians, who are emotional and excitable, and there are a series of preliminaries to be gone through before the lights are made to work properly. For the electricians the grand and exciting experience of bringing St. Mark's out of the night is largely a matter of dealing with wires, small screws, bulbs and poky little holes, and thus the public, so patiently waiting, are treated to a series of false alarms as adjustments are made. The lights of the arcades, shining up to now as usual, suddenly go out one at a time, then flash on again. Then they all go off again and come back one at a time. This tantalizing performance is repeated several times with variations in different parts of the Piazza, on one side then on the other, to the accompaniment of waves of sighing from the thousands of spectators, first sighs of pleasure, then terrible sighs of disappointment. The musicians by now are hopelessly drowned by the noise of the herd, but still they continue to move their arms and open their mouths. But, at last, the lights of the Piazza go out one at a time, to a final sigh of pleasure. The music stops, and the whole of Venice seems to be plunged in darkness. For a moment a curious sensation of coldness and fear sweeps the Piazza and there is an uncanny silence that only occurs in vast crowds. . . . Slowly, very slowly, with the inevitability of a dream, the Basilica begins to look phosphorescent. The magic stills the crowd and they are held in its spell. Then, from a faint glow the colours begin to emerge, slowly, slowly . . . pink arcades, sea-green domes, golden Byzantine crosses; faint at first, the light stealing in slow waves backwards and forwards . . . lighter, lighter yet, until, against the indigo night, the Basilica glows with erotic unreality, robbed of form, robbed of substance—a manifestation hanging in darkness. More than ever, at this moment, we think of St. Mark's as a palace more suitable for the ocean bed than for dry land; as though it were made of fretted coral and shells, with seaweeds waving above its arches, sea-horses rearing on the parapet, and clusters of

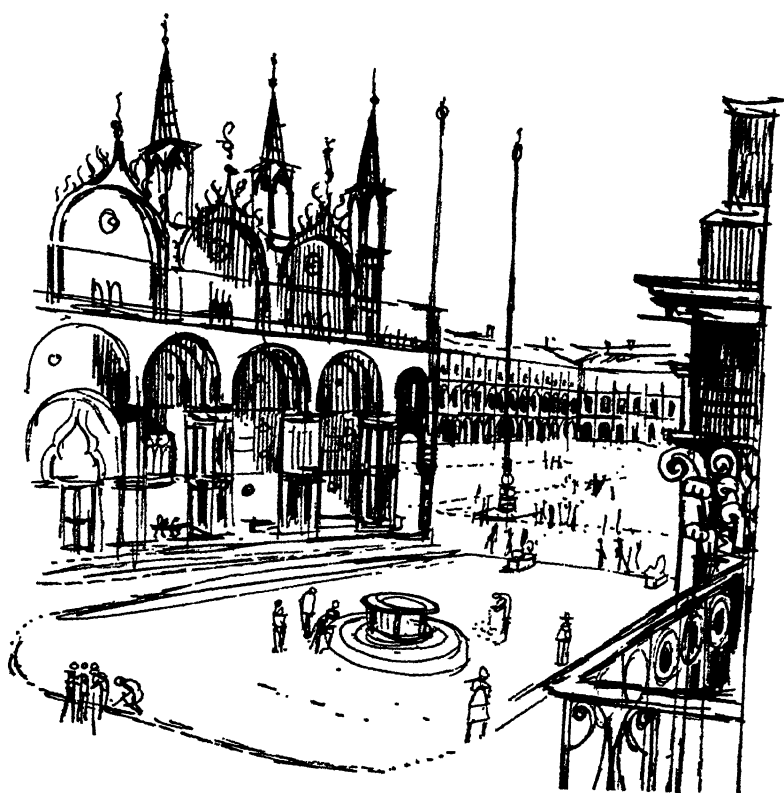
under-water plants growing on the domes. . . . Here is Venice the theatrical, Venice the spell-binder!

\* \* \*

BUT the illumination of St. Mark's does not occur very often, nor is it done every year. By midnight, on a normal day, the Piazza is beginning to wear the look of sadness that comes after the party. There are still many people about, mostly sitting in groups upon the steps of the flag-poles or else on the benches of the Loggetta, but the parade is over. The cafés are almost empty, and the table-tops have a metallic glitter in the lamplight. The bells start their midnight commotion, but few people bother to look at the Giants banging in the dark. In the archway of the Merceria a few doubtful characters hang around, still hoping to effect last-minute introductions. The Basilica is now securely sealed against the terrors of the night: the great bronze doors are firmly closed, the pigeons silent upon their perches.

Life, however, does not come to a standstill, and continues in one or two nearby places in full swing. Sometimes the orchestras continue playing, but playing now tunes to please themselves. The *gondolieri*, after their day is done, come up from the Molo and stand in groups, hats in hand, among the empty tables, and quietly listen to the sweeter strains of real Italian music. . . . The Calle Larga, just behind the Piazza, is as full as ever, and the cafés and bars are thronged with people who have little intention of going to bed. And in the Piazzetta dei Leoncini the cafés seem to receive all the stragglers from the Piazza, who sit and drink, talk, sing, dance and sometimes quarrel violently until the early hours. To the last the day is exuberant, though at this hour usually bizarre, and sometimes sinister.

One of the old ladies, who was so coyly selling camellias four or five hours ago, moves briskly in her sheath of black stockingette, her basket empty on her arm, and abuses the waiter in a bar close by. This scene is enacted almost every night, until, still muttering and turning round to fling a final curse, she disappears up a dark alley and is not seen again until next day with another fresh basket of pure white flowers.



*Piazzetta dei Leoncini*





## Shops

EVERY morning the man underneath my balcony fixes the blind of his shop with a bit of wire. I discovered that this is not an isolated occurrence, but that many of the shop blinds in the Calle Larga behind St. Mark's need adjustments before they stay up. This takes place round about ten o'clock, which is the time the shops prepare themselves to receive visitors. The blinds seem to be broken in great numbers and the only way they can be fixed for the day is with the help of a kit of tools and step-ladders, and thus it is common to see three or four shops in a row with ladders in front of them with men hammering and using chisels, wrenches and screwdrivers. Where I take breakfast the bartender comes out solemnly every morning with a ladder, a hammer, a chisel, pieces from a wooden box and a three-inch nail. From the wood he makes wedges, then climbs the ladder and hammers them into the blind-fitting on one side. On the other side the procedure is slightly different—the large nail is knocked through a hole. As the lane is very narrow, the folding of the step-ladders among the early traffic—the passing sweeper, the wine barrow, bakers' boys, postmen, housewives and early postcard sellers—forms a little music-hall act.

The boy from the tobacconist's shop opposite comes out to flick away a few spots of dirt from the windows, but they rarely require washing in this clean atmosphere. They are sometimes polished in a very leisurely fashion. Nothing is done in a hurry here. . . . A plasterer close by, in newspaper hat, gently fills in a few cracks with cement and strokes it smooth with a wet brush. . . . The ice-man comes along and delivers his load against the heat of the day, and the wine-man fresh bottles against the thirst. . . . The owners of the lace shops—the most boring shops in Venice, hung with yards and yards of lace tablecloths, table-mats, pillow slips and so forth—take up their positions at the shop doorways with an anxious look upon their faces. On some mornings two nuns arrive with huge bundles under their arms, and, standing black amongst the white, unwrap more and more lace. . . .

The knick-knack shops arrange their trays of souvenirs for the tourists: gondolas in chromium, Lions of St. Mark in all materials, little musical boxes, glass ashtrays from Murano, shell boxes, and models of St. Mark's in globes in which snow falls when they are shaken—the Venetian variants on the now almost universal range of objects sold to tourists—worthless most of them but occasionally pleasing. The shops that sell glass necklaces arrange their festoons down the sides of the doorways, a feature which makes so many shops in Venice look seductive. These are some of the nicer of the more common glass products prepared for tourists—necklaces of sequences of small sprays of lemons and oranges with spiky green leaves, or tiny glass birds and leaves, small flowers in neat rows, or strings of variegated glass, single or plaited into heavy chains. Coral necklaces too of many kinds, and the more usual heavy swathes in white or vermilion or turquoise. But to wear a necklace of lemons, oranges or birds is a delightful idea, with ear-rings to match—doves nestling in the ears! They are much too small in scale to be vulgar in design, mere drops and splashes of glass left over after the large, ugly vases are made. Still I have never seen anybody wearing them. Glass mosaic brooches are a great feature of this cheap Italian jewellery, redolent of futile hours and bad pay! Views of Venice, the ubiquitous lion, the gondola, the moon—all the stock features, and the more traditional designs of doves drinking from bowls or perched on dishes of fruit or vines. What a long way these last three designs have travelled from Roman times. . . . Then there are the extraordinarily bad cameos engraved on ovals of shell: oh, how tedious it becomes to be shown trays of these things by every curio-seller in Venice!—until, eventually, we become known to each other and they give us a wink instead of a peep. Finally there are those dreadful picture shops, selling examples of latter-day *veduta* painting. What a sad story it would make if one were to write about the people who made all this rubbish for the tourists. It is hardly worth while as a subject; and I have seen some conditions under which lace is produced—picturesque and depressing.

## *Toyshop*

C AVES and toyshops are always inextricably mixed in the mind. I do not mean sandstone caves, where large flagstones, in their gargantuan fall, have left a few awkwardly shaped holes for bats, but those sparkling caverns of limestone, where, secretly and in the dark, nature has been at play and produced highly decorated interiors in an ageless rococo of her own—subterranean jokes which have persisted ever since the early days when the rocks were laid ponderously down. In the astonishment of torch-light the floors, ceilings and walls glitter and shine, and sprout and hang with a thousand evocative shapes. But it is less the sight of the caves than the strange echoes they awaken later in the mind that are significant, as though in some odd way we were reconnected with myths and legends long since out of fashion: these in turn, by their very unreality, take us back to childhood, where in a period of almost erotic delight common objects were animistic and filled us with elation or horror. . . . And thus, in the Christmas pantomime—one of the last remaining vehicles, along with Punch and Judy, of the old stories of magical heroes and giants (both oddly enough connected with Italy)—we re-live the thrill of caves and all the mad dramas of childhood. We reproduce the sparkle, the joys and terrors of caves, and live once again through all the more acute and turbulent emotions. . . . And toys, of course, however faithful they may be to reality (including those engaging reproductions of modern weapons which are coming to occupy even the fantasy lives of two-year-olds) come straight from some magic cave, some large, mysterious, inexhaustible womb where toy motor cars, mechanical guns, telephones and cooking stoves seem to have their beginnings. . . .

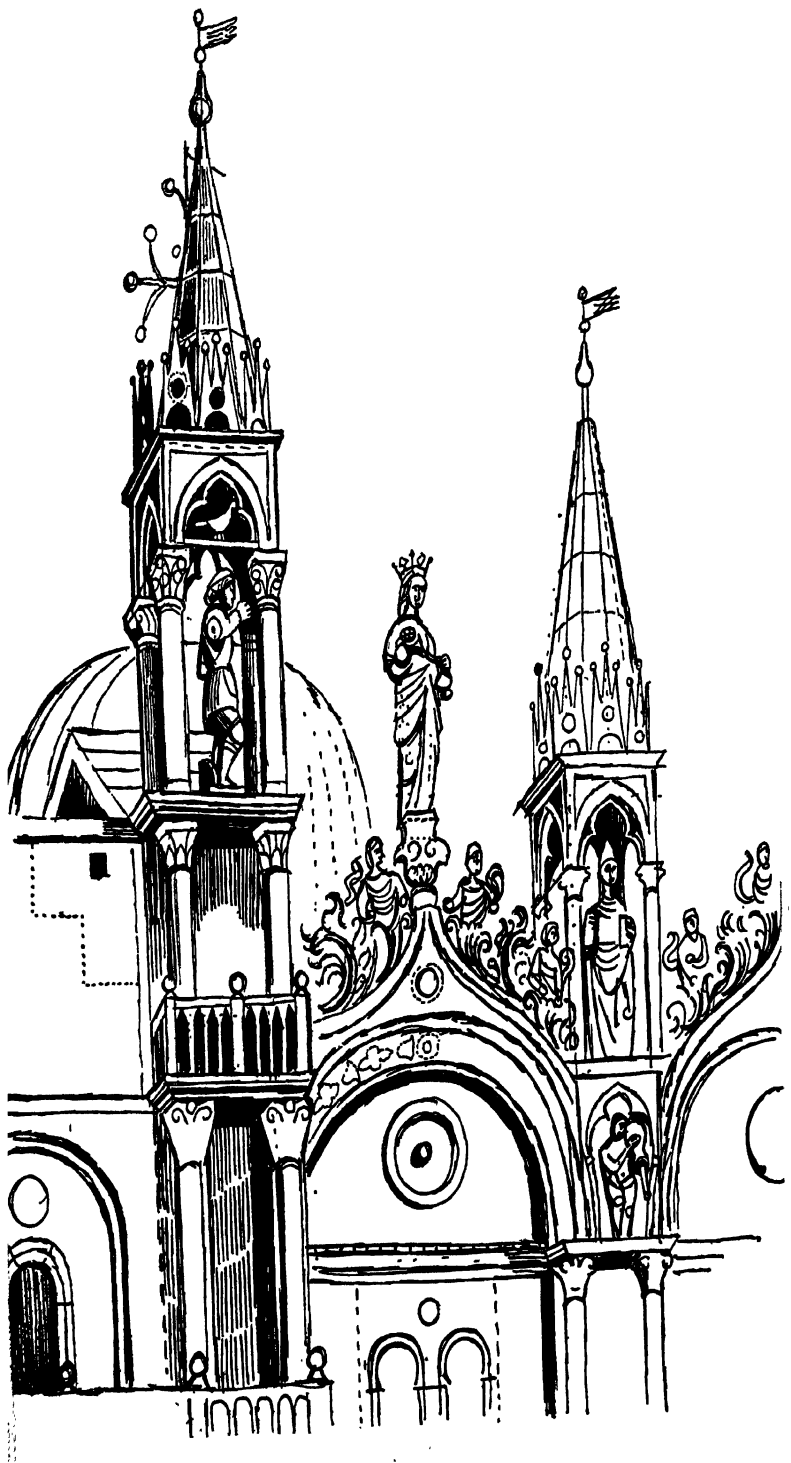
Imagine then, if you can, in the very heart of Venice (so near the heart that it is but a few hundred yards away from the traditional commercial centre of the fabulous days, the Campo San Bartolomeo and the Rialto) in a street so narrow that it might be a declivity between rocks, a fantastic toyshop wherein are displayed, in riotous

fashion, all the bright new riches of such a cave. At the rub of his lamp—itsself so hardly come by—a modern father may, after paying out some extraordinary sum of money for the privilege of preserving dreams, gratify the wishes of his children. The sides of the doorways are hung with enticing samples of the goods within, while above, like the facia of a Moresque bazaar, are large embroidered hangings—rugs and bedspreads with crudely drawn scenes of Venice in raw and strident colours. Inside is a scene of wonder, a deep, encrusted cave lined and hung with toys and festive decorations. The emotions are further disturbed, with tremendous dramatic effect, by the low ceiling of the shop which is entirely made of mirrors, so that the shelves and displays of toys, as well as the customers, appear to be hanging down upon themselves. By looking upwards you gaze into your own eyes looking down upon you from the top of a telescoped body, while all about move hanging dwarfs, walking as it were upon another ceiling higher up. The objects suspended from the mirrors—festoons of coloured paper, coloured balls in nets, paper lanterns, fans and suchlike things—are immediately reflected upwards, and seem like fantastic plants growing in mid-air, while the duplication of every object and of every movement—all upside down—makes the place appear twice as big as it really is, thus increasing not only the stock but the crowd.

On the shelves lining the walls, on the trays and on the long table in the middle of the room, displayed in complete disorder, are the toys and other objects. . . . Coloured baskets, mechanical toys of all descriptions, rows of dolls, celluloid fish, rattles, different varieties of aeroplanes, tanks, machine guns, cannon, daggers, swords, autogyros, railway sets. Rubber dolls and dogs for chewing. Ships, submarines, telephones, trick birds and trumpets. Cooking stoves, bathroom sets, cots with dolls, scales, hammers, saws, chisels and saucepans. Sewing machines, flat irons and pistols. Lead and plastic battalions—Romans, Red Indians, Alpine troops, Arabs, Scotsmen, horse guards, privates, generals and marines. Babies in celluloid eggs, spoons, knives, forks. Bundles of beads in cellophane bags, farmyard animals and spinning tops; trumpets, tambourines, guitars, pianos and accordions. Counting frames, snakes-and-ladders, puzzles, bricks. Balls of all kinds, shovels, buckets, bows and arrows. Skipping ropes, hoops, wooden horses, wheelbarrows. Woolly toys—bears, monkeys, lions, rocking horses and jungle games. Mexican hats, darts, cowboy costumes. Painted

## TOYSHOP

fans, decorated mirrors, shell boxes, musical boxes, glass necklaces, silver gondolas, brass galleons, silver Lions of St. Mark. Decorated glassware, dolls' pottery, weathervanes. Inlaid souvenir boxes, scooters, doves drinking at alabaster vases, horn ships, gondolas of painted wood. Glass balls with falling snow in the Piazza, thermos flasks, teething rings, crucifixes of shells. . . . Prams, pushchairs, reins with bells, fur dogs, net bags and parasols. . . .



## Summer Storm

IT has been one of the worst summers in Venice for many a year, or so I am told: that is to say, it has rained about once a fortnight. This piece of diabolical weather, so bad for the tourist trade—but so good for the streets!—all seems a part of the general tendency of the twentieth century, when everything is apparently getting worse. The spinners of yarns, the idling gondoliers, the old men sitting on the steps of the Columns in the Piazzetta, all talk of the “good old days” in exactly the same way as we do at home, except for the one important fact that the weather really was better in past summers, whereas for us in England the weather only seems to have been good in novels about Henley in Edwardian times. The spectacle of summer rain in Venice, providing it does not go on too long, I always find rather exciting. It is so unusual as to have all the charm of novelty, and as it is nearly always accompanied by thunder and possibly hail, it is rather like being involved in a curious and perverted firework display. The skies change colour violently for a few hours, there are coloured flashes, and thousands of ice balls like large pearls tinkle on the roofs and clatter in the streets.

This evening there was rain on the Riva, and from the Isola di Sant’ Elena to the Salute a magnificent thunderstorm raged and blazed for two hours, equalling the summer spectacles the municipality puts on for the benefit of tourists in all respects except one—it was not quite so remunerative. That most satisfying group of buildings of San Giorgio Maggiore shone pure white against a lead-blue sky, the sea became a deep turquoise and the great dome of the Salute black against a lemon sunset. Vast forks of lightning trailed over the Adriatic with aimless extravagance, and sheets of rain swished about and bounced on the quayside. Along the Riva the cafés filled up with a sudden inrush of visitors—idlers, fishermen, gondoliers and sailors all in their summer clothes, and astonished groups of tourists who bore the air of having been shamefully swindled by the tourist agencies. To the gentle noise of the ice-machines and the distant hooting of steamers, they sipped

unnecessary coffees and watched with patience the adventures of the storm. Directly in front of us were moored the empty steamboats for Chioggia and the islands, the tar-black tugs, bobbing gondolas and a magnificent barge with two red stars on the prow like astonished eyes and a vivid sail of gamboge yellow against the dark grey sky. As the rain stopped and the sunlight broke through from the Grand Canal, an enormous rainbow formed behind San Giorgio Maggiore, and slowly, still against a dark sky, it moved along the whole length of the waterfront, apparently having one foot in the sea in front of us and another on the Lido. People now began to venture out again, shook themselves like dogs and resumed the evening perambulations along the waterfront and up into the Piazza. For quite an hour the great arc of the rainbow moved about the sky, now seen against the spiky cresting of the Palazzo Ducale, now against the statues of the Libreria Vecchia. Lightning, more distant now, played far out over the Adriatic, and finally the sun shone on the dark backcloth behind St. Mark's and turned it a flaming orange. All the domes and crockets became a cobalt blue, and the golden crosses, all the metal ornaments and the mosaics shone and glistened in the evening light.



## Restaurants

IT is wise not to settle too quickly on a "favourite restaurant" in Venice, as the general standard of cooking is so high. I am sure that to stay here for a year would be to find not one but many. Most writers of travel books refer to their "favourite restaurant," which is often a source of irritation to English people who are as likely as not living in a town or city where there isn't a good restaurant within miles. Yet the phenomenon of good cooking in Continental countries is a constant source of surprise to the English, and it comes to play such an important part in foreign travel that any writer who failed to mention it would make a very selfconscious omission. To judge by the conversation of many English people abroad it might be assumed that the main reason for leaving home was to eat good food, for so bad have things become in English restaurants and so restricted the diet in the home that eating on the Continent has become something akin to an obsession. Connoisseurship of food and wine—another of those almost extinct virtues now made the subject of selfconscious club dinners (milder versions of the Hell Fire Club of West Wycombe)—has now given place to *addiction*, and it is no uncommon sight to see knots of English people abroad indulging themselves orgiastically, glassy-eyed and intent upon plates of meat and delicacies, or passing secret information to each other in the evenings about strings of good restaurants from the Channel Ports to the Balkans. This form of addiction is for once fully justified, for any nation which has to endure such food as we have can readily be forgiven for exaggerating the importance of cooking when on a Continental holiday. The people left at home, staunch starch-eaters, retaliate with some such phrase as "food snobbism," but if ever any phrase fell short of the truth, this does, even if nothing can be proved except by sampling. Personally, to be rather facetious, I would say that cooking is about the only form of art appreciated by everybody; and whereas it might be difficult for many people when travelling abroad to become deeply interested in painting or architecture, they rarely

fail to respond to a work of art on a plate (even though stomachs unused to certain rich combinations have been known to revolt a little later).

The great restaurants of the world have earned their reputations (though they don't always live up to them), but, almost without fail, they are trying and pompous, and I for one—as usual—go my own way and make my own discoveries, after having my trial “famous” meal so as not to miss anything. I rarely fail to discover, after an adventurous week or two, some cheaper place which is as good and often better, with an intimate native atmosphere unspoilt by the luxuries of polite furnishings, ruined by the praises of authors or shy with the presence of great men, dead or alive. After all, what are our lives for if we are not going to enjoy them uniquely, and what are our stomachs for if we are not going to let them have discoveries and adventures of their own? A stomach is a secret thing, invisible and sensitive, but it knows what is good without being told by a publisher. After a while it is on the scent like a hound, and then says one fine evening: “Halt! This is the place. We don't need to go any farther!” And there we stay, if we are wise, with our stomach, and live together through heavenly meals. . . . The padrone, the hefty signora, the cook, the waiters and the wine-boy soon know when they have met friends. We are taken into the family, one's stomach becomes a respected person (not just a carpet bag as in England), and it comes along like a favoured guest, every evening, to be fed on good things. . . . Very soon even money becomes of less importance, and we use each other's Christian names, and though our common charter is only a menu, and food our main link, we build our lives together intimately, my stomach, the restaurant staff and I—a little world of importance, spinning on its own axis, self-centred, contented. . . .

To such a place one brings one's friends (those quick, effortless friendships one makes in Venice a week before they fade away never more to be continued!), or those friends one always somehow finds who belong to the international band of wandering vagabonds like oneself—ragamuffins of the art world—who, because they do not come on Polyglot Tours, can usually stay as long as they like, who, though relatively poor or with secret fortunes, have managed to slip away from responsibilities. The restaurant becomes a rendezvous, other stomachs come, and with them they bring companionship, without which even a stomach would be empty. . . .

Though an author may say something about Venetian Gothic architecture worth reading, or dismiss the whole contents of the *Accademia in Venice* as "rubbish," as one man did so effortlessly two years ago, or cast long shadows down the years as Ruskin has done, he can do little more for the reader than mention his favourite restaurant, because he cannot provide a meal with every copy of the book. He is to be forgiven for mentioning it, though it may have become tedious, and even though it is quite impossible to find other people's restaurants (the streets always seem to have been re-named since the book was written), any book on Italy that does not mention food is suspect immediately. If it does not mention food it will surely have an extra packing of "culture" in it that will smack more of the head than the heart. . . . Eating, for any traveller who does not live on leaves from old guide-books, is just as important as works of art, for though works of art may lift the dusty veils of history, eating connects one with the life of today. Food, life and love have always been inextricably mixed, and in Italy for centuries the brimming cornucopia has been dragged along by happy cherubs. Thus when a writer tells of his favourite restaurant, though it may be impossible to find it when you come, or however remote you may be from him when you read his words, he is inviting you to sit in the next chair, behind the vinegar and oil, the tooth-picks, the salt and pepper, behind the silver vase with red carnations in the middle of the table. Soon, if only as a faint echo of a dream, the wine and cornucopia will come . . . except that taste, unlike the flavour of a thought, cannot be conveyed by words, and thus the dream will be sure to disappoint and mean absolutely nothing. But no matter, restaurants are being mentioned: let us pass on.

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THE Venetian instinct to beguile and amuse has been brought up to date in restaurants, and quite a number of commercial sidelines have been developed to help the tourist enjoy his food. Elsewhere I have mentioned the street vendors—the sellers of postcards and maps, cameos and necklaces, those artists who specialize in pig-like caricatures, the newspaper sellers and the flashlight photographers. They all continue their rounds into the evenings, and call at all the most frequented restaurants and *trattorie* with great regularity. Of this group the flashlight photographers cause the greatest interference, as we are temporarily blinded in the act of eating a

piece of veal. The results of their labours are rarely flattering, as people are not as a rule at their best with their mouths open. . . . But the wandering musicians are nearly always welcome, and with accordion, violin and guitar, as well as voice, bring the musical delights of the Piazza to the dinner table. A plate is passed round and a small fee levied, and nobody, I am sure, begrudges the musicians their money, various and unequal as their talents are. In remoter parts of Venice, away from the tourist centres, the entertainments become more interesting. I have seen a wonderful troupe of child acrobats, and the most strange and gipsy-like singers wandering alone, or, on occasion, been present when some strolling musicians have come into a *trattoria* and stayed the whole night. But these are chance adventures which cannot be foretold. . . . Then there is the man who enters and attaches a huge tin butterfly to his forehead, where it noisily buzzes and flaps its gaudy wings—the seller of mechanical toys. Out of the depths of a Gladstone bag he brings his wares, and quite rapidly, among the wine-glasses and the fruit, hop and dance and gambol a most attractive miniature circus—bears, mice, monkeys, trick cyclists, clowns, donkeys, all joggling and dithering and grinning. As though finally to sum up the art of make-belief, when this fascinating troupe have gone back into the bag, he puts upon the table a fair-sized doll, which writhes in every limb and rolls its eyes and cries. . . . This never fails to attract the ladies—and disconcert the men—but its price proves so prohibitive that it is almost cheaper to have a real one.

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BEHIND the Teatro Fenice, near the monument inlaid with cannon balls and cannon, is the Taverna Fenice, where, under an awning and hidden by a screen of frondy plants from the gaze of hungry passers-by, it is possible to eat some of the best food in Venice. It is very near the theatre, and in the evenings, when the weather is fine, the awning is drawn back to reveal gorgeously dressed people dining before the performance. The theatre starts at half-past nine in Venice. . . . But near St. Mark's, in a quiet little *campo* behind a smaller church, I have found a restaurant, which modestly calls itself a *trattoria*, where the food is just as good—although the menu less extensive—at half the price. It too has an awning (and a hedge of privets instead of potted ferns), as well as the added amenities of a pin-table and billiards saloon and a homely bar. There, treated with

## RESTAURANTS

the minimum of fuss and with the most natural Venetian courtesy, I have browsed through one splendid meal after another, each one as good as the last. I have lived through the tribulations of the waiters—the headaches, the toothaches, the anxieties over grown-up sons, even a pregnancy—none of which in any way interfered with the quality of the cooking (except on one occasion when almost everybody had toothache). When the season is over and all the visitors are hibernating, the waiters pack up and go hunting or become fishermen. . . . Who could resist a waiter called Tiziano who says, “Would you like a Mixed Fry of the Sea, a Sole of St. Peter, or Octopus, Sior Lorenzo?”



## Trattoria

SOME of the best steaks in Venice are cooked in a small *trattoria* in a narrow alley behind the Bocca della Piazza. There are no airs and graces to attract the tourists, merely two rows of tables, a bar and a back room, starkly lit by the fitful light of neon tubes. So strong is the light that every detail stands out clearly as in a dream: harsh shapes, one against the other; everything in cruel focus. There is the slight feeling of a tiled cellar about the place; a whiteness everywhere: on walls and tables, and among the glitter of chromium fittings on the bar. The padrone, who is only four feet six high and the colour of a grey cigar, greets his visitors with a smile—a complete set of silver teeth. He is a happy little man, with a suave business air, persuasive and silvery, talking gaily of his connections in Trieste, that back-alley for soldiers and sailors of today. That he is unpleasing in spite of his affability is quickly felt, for everything here, except the food, is not what it seems. The scene quickly changes from normality to the bizarre: we are trapped, as in the middle of a film, unable to leave.

Near the entrance to the *trattoria*, leaning against the bar, is a cluster of French poets, intoning in that Mohammedan way of theirs some of the latest obscurantist verses. Two large Italians are making a protracted good-bye, kissing each other as though they were never to meet again, then finally saying as they break apart, "Until tomorrow!" There is a constant coming and going up and down the central aisle, and far more people seem to be coming in than there are tables to hold them. The normal business of the *trattoria* goes on with difficulty among the commotion and the waiters, have trouble getting the dishes to the tables. By the kitchen door is a great refrigerator, with its door open like the door of a sepulchre, showing rows of dismembered sheep on hooks and piles of liver and kidneys and uncooked fish. From the kitchen comes the sound of sizzling and the scraping of metal and the involved smell of cooking. A table near the refrigerator holds baskets of fruit, olives and salads in large glass jars, platefuls of cooked peppers, horrid to look

at, surprising to eat. Above are rows of *chianti* bottles, straw bellies touching.

At the next table sits a man with a pallid face having dinner with an enormous cream poodle as high as himself, both eating, with a great show of fondness, off the same group of plates. Behind him sits another man reading a sporting paper, but he is so shortsighted that he peers at the paper from a distance of two inches and seems to rub his face up and down the columns. In the far corner a girl in a vermilion dress counts money on an empty white tablecloth, and at another table near her is an American soldier, with red eyes and a curious lack of control over the muscles of his mouth, eating steak. Everyone in the café is talking to himself: pockets of activated loneliness in the white light. . . . In the back room is pandemonium, a crowd of figures, mostly sailors, their all-white shore uniforms contrasting with the vivid colours of the dresses and the oily black hair of the girls. They are swaying and lurching, shouting and giggling, and occasionally a small man creeps out from the crowd, his hands festooned with artificial pearls and glass beads which he is trying to sell to the sailors. More sailors come rolling in, in their tight white suits, shouting to each other and constantly adjusting their white caps with a jaunty action on their short hair. They join the others in the back room, where a state of easiness prevails, of extreme familiarity, for they all seem to know each other, to have met before in Trieste. . . .

When the American soldier has "figgered out" that I am English he picks up his steak and Coca-cola and joins me. He has been here on leave for six days, but has never gone to his hotel room except to wash. Tonight he complains of extreme fatigue and eats underdone steak. Three years in the army—this is the life. Apparently. . . . However, his main grumble of the evening is that now the sailors are in port the prices will rocket. Prices always double. Inflation overnight. As much as would pay for a room at a grand hotel: and as much as would pay for a room at a small hotel for a fortnight. Different amenities of course.





## *Fragments: One*

I DO not think that I should like to approach Venice from the air. The city should be seen from no higher vantage point than the top of the Campanile, or else, metaphysically, from heaven.

BOYS in short shorts and loose, flapping coat shirts, holding huge bunches of gladioli wrapped in cellophane. . . . Where are they carrying these torches? Are they torches of love? Or is it another funeral? But always gladioli, all over Venice.

RUSKIN even did Bradford a bit of good in an odd way, for did they not build the Wool Exchange in sham Venetian Gothic? He trounced them rarely when they asked him to give a speech about it. . . . First, develop a theory about the virtues of an architectural style that flourished in another century, and do it so convincingly that people club together to build in it. When they invite you to come along to discuss the building, and flatter you by realizing your dreams, only then do you see how foolish it all is, and severely trounce them for trying to please you. Such a muddle of perversities and niceties! The building has now gone completely black, but the Palazzo Ducale remains pink and white.

THE Bronze Horses are delightfully out of place perched up there on the parapet of St. Mark's. We have come to accept them as part of the general scene of splendour: of richness added to richness. Sometimes, in an idle moment, I wonder if Canaletto was right when he suggested in one of his *Capricci*—now at Windsor—that they be remounted on pedestals in front of the Basilica? But that was his idea, not mine! I am content (and rather excited) to think

## THE LION AND THE PEACOCK

that I can actually stroke the behinds of the horses that were in Nero's Circus and high on Trajan's Arch, and in so many other fine places besides.

PIAZZA SAN MARCO: note the clever interlocking of spaces and solids—the large *piazza* with the Basilica jutting into it, and the two *piazzetti*, neatly luring one round the corners. And the vast bulk of the Campanile balanced by the space leading to the Porta della Carta, between St. Mark's and the Palazzo Ducale. How much is design, how much accident?

A MAN with binoculars in St. Mark's peering into the farthest Byzantine heaven. . . .

THAT odd window behind the Bronze Horses: so obviously like the end of a railway station. It is a successful solution to the lighting of the nave, but it spoils the façade. It appears in Gentile Bellini's painting of 1496. In those days the mosaics on the front were as fine as those inside; today they are only tolerable from the far end of the Piazza, except in one instance. In 1496 the horses were gilded—as was much else on the front—and thus showed up more against the great dark window. Today the horses merge into it at no great distance. Wouldn't it have been interesting to have had a Byzantine stained-glass window in the same spirit as the mosaics?

SAN GIORGIO DEI GRECI: Ikons, magic pictures, which through being adored became sacred and worked miracles. . . . (Those endless squabbles in Byzantine life about God: how many natures the Son had; of equal importance with the betting in the Hippodrome. . . . Theodora said at the sack of Byzantium when asked to flee: "Byzantium is winding sheet enough.")

WATCHING men moving paving-stones near the Rialto, to lay down a telephone cable, made me think of the incredible amount

of hard labour that must have gone into the building of Venice. For apart from one or two islands rising out of the lagoons the city is entirely man-made: even artificial islands. (The latter were made by driving piles of oak, larch, elm and poplar, in an upright position, packed close together, into the sub-soil. Away from the destructive action of air and water, they formed platforms of iron-like strength, and apparently they get harder as they grow older. The trunks were slowly rammed into the bed of clay, some twenty to twenty-five feet in thickness, but if they were forced below this they penetrated to sand and water beneath, which then forced the pile out again in a geyser. The piles once firmly fixed in the clay and fastened together formed an enormous block and became all one with the building. The water side of the buildings is nearly always faced with marble, in order to resist the tidal water.) The whole of Venice is made of stones and marbles, laid in slabs and blocks and sheets, until it is veritably sheathed in stones. . . . Bricks are faced with marble, or else mosaic, or marble stucco. . . . Then the roofs are tiled with Roman tiles, and the great buildings sheathed with lead or copper on domes and pinnacles, and the skyline is alive with statues, crosses and pennants. . . . The white Istrian stone, which can be cut conveniently in slabs, can be used like planks, and has given rise to much interesting building, as on the roof of the parapets of St. Mark's.

The stones weather black in parts, but mostly stay white in this clean atmosphere, the tooling as fresh as on the day it was left. The domes of St. Mark's are sheathed in lead, nailed on to a sturdy wooden foundation; the rain has made lively curves in black on the lead, to that the great bulbs look as though they are hung with a thousand tassels of black seaweed. . . . The stones on the bridges and parapets are particularly pleasing where they have worn smooth and shiny with age. Every single stone has been brought into Venice. . . .

THE weekend crowds are the greatest in the Piazza, when boats, trains and buses bring people from the outlying islands and towns. On weekdays there are fewer people: though it is odd to see work-people coming home to Venice at night: a typical city crowd with briefcases and attaché cases—but without bowler hats—fresh from

the mundane tasks of the twentieth century, coming home to such a fantastic and brilliant city.

A CRUCIFIX in a barber's shop.

THE "artists' cafés" of yesteryear have now become "film stars' cafés."

THE most mediæval street in Venice is the Calle del Paradiso, narrow, cavernous, full of old shops and dreary wine cellars. Eternally draped with washing all the way along, so that the light is filtered through shirts, bed sheets and underclothing. At the far end is the impressive, beautifully proportioned Gothic arch spanning the street and opening on to the Ponte del Paradiso.

NOT far from the Colleone Monument is a bookstall at the entrance to a *sottoportico*. As I was passing by, or sauntering rather, I saw a youth go up to the illustrated papers hanging down the side. He glanced round, and then drew out of his shirt a small magazine which he popped back into its place on the stall. Then, with quick deliberation he chose another one, flicked through it, and put that one down his shirt. Walking past me he gave me a great grin. He had only been to change his magazine: he'd finished with the first one.

PHOTOGRAPHS taken of your wedding at all its most sacred moments! Do not let your memories fade! Let us accompany you to the altar! . . . (As though the business of getting married is not unnerving enough, you can now be photographed, by flashlight, at the following sacred moments: (1) placing flowers on the altar, (2) kneeling with your bride, (3) placing the ring on her finger,

(4) cutting the cake, (5) leaving by gondola.) Eat your cake and have it.

THE sight of grown-up sons going round Venice with their mothers fills me with anguish. This seems to be a particularly American custom.

A LADY in the upper hall of the Scuola di San Rocco enjoying the Tintoretos through green sun glasses. . . .

MIDSUMMER: now is the time of year for schoolteachers to come out. From all over Europe and America they converge on Venice, a universal type. . . . Also come the gaunt, indomitable, upright ladies from polite art academies in England, here for their annual course of "culture," each sticking to their guide-books as though they were the Scriptures, travelling frigidly and efficiently with their individual pots of English marmalade and sending home a shower of postcards where every other word is "lovely."

ROME is masculine, Venice feminine: the old soldier and the courtesan.

THERE are great numbers of people who talk to themselves in Venice. I suppose this is only to be expected in a city where everything except the most intimate is done in public. Private life spills over into public life; there is no strict dividing line as in England. It would be possible to listen in to people's thoughts if you knew the dialect: as it is you must be content with catching the keywords of *cento cinquanta* and *due mille lire*, for most people seem to be holding a monologue about money.

WHEN a postman empties the boxes of Venice *showers* of postcards fall out. . . . Like a fisherman dragging in the shoals.

## THE LION AND THE PEACOCK

NEWS from home is the only thing that can break the spell of Venice.

VENICE provides many ample marble benches for resting-places, though, as there are no ruins, fewer places than Rome. But one is never really at a loss for a seat, a warm seat, made of marble. I always think that to be sat upon is one of the main functions of a plinth: ample mouldings bottom high, from which to watch the world go by. . . . Walls that start straight from the ground and rise sheer without ledges are unfriendly, fit only for dogs and slogans. . . . Venice is the ideal city for strolling, sitting, watching, leaning, or even for lying full length if you have a mind to. I have had some most refreshing sleeps on the marble steps of the Salute, head on my knapsack like a tramp—lying in the cool shade of the most ornate Baroque building in the world: a sumptuous thought.

SUMMER dreams on the roof of St. Mark's. The white flag-stones; the thick, squat parapets. Small, intimate, sun-drenched spaces. Hot stones. Views of the carvings round the arches as one lies underneath them: the ugly water carriers, cramped up, holding the water spouts; the saints under their canopies, the angels kneeling among the crockets. . . . Pigeons peeping through the balusters, coyly tilting their heads. What does it feel like to be a pigeon living among the fretted marbles and the gilding? Absurd question.

VENICE is no more slummy than many cities—it only shows more. The more sophisticated the buildings the worse they look in decay. . . . The soothing atmosphere of civilized decay. . . . The sadness of a faded beauty who waits for the dark veils of night and the magic of artificial light.

MEMORY of two years ago: when we had a picnic-lunch here, in the disused cloisters of Madonna del Orto—of black olives, *scampi*, half a pound of ham, rolls and butter, fruit and a flask. The grass

FRAGMENTS: ONE

is long as it was then, the currant bushes are thriving, the ants are still busy among the stones. The well is dried up. The boat builders are still making their long boats under the arches and motorboats in the refectory. Belfry above. Tintoretto asleep indoors.

FULL moon. Full moon in Venice fills me with pain. It is best never to wander alone in the middle of the Piazzetta at midnight among the splendid buildings, and watch the moon travel behind the statues on the Libreria Vecchia, lighting up each one in turn, or to let it rest between the pinnacle at the corner and the Pillar of St. Theodore, or else you are sure to ask yourself the question: "Has my youth been wasted?"

ON the Ponte dei Angeli in the heat of the day: an old man having a fit. Stretched in the sun, clutching in one hand a few lire.

ON the Grand Canal: a surprise. A gondola *races* by. The gondolier *sits* comfortably in the cushioned seat, wryly smiling at the surprise he causes, arms folded. He had fitted a petrol engine.

ON the Riva: a touching "caterpillar" of four-year-old orphan boys, about twenty of them. Little straw hats at the back of their heads. Orphanage hair. Blue smocks. Black shoes. Hand in hand, in pairs, shepherded by two harassed nuns. They pass an ice-cream seller. He is so overcome that he stops them and gives them an ice-cream cornet each.

ON the Riva: at night. An old, old man with a ten-foot telescope in shining brass. Forty lire to look at the full moon. Long white hair on his shoulders; another Venetian survival: a mediæval astronomer-astrologer. . . .

## THE LION AND THE PEACOCK

I MET some Yorkshire people who had the curious notion that Venice was built on piles in the manner of the prehistoric lake dwellings of Holderness. They were very disappointed not to be able to see the piles. As though the buildings on top were not enough.

DOG collars in Venice are truly magnificent. They are inlaid with mother of pearl, have designs of stars and spikes in silver and brass on vermilion and blue leather, and are hung with bells and silver balls. If only we could think up something like that for ourselves instead of for the dogs, to revive a little of the fifteenth century.

IN the Swiss café: a large and very fat man in filthy *lederhosen* having breakfast. He orders beer, takes out of his skin bag a hunk of bread, butter and a *complete cured ham*. With a large hunting knife, kept down the side of his hairy leg, he carves thick slices for his breakfast.

I ASKED an English friend what he thought of the Basilica of St. Mark. He cocked his head on one side and regarded it for a while. Then he said: "I *think* I prefer the Pavilion."

AT the junction of the canals, in the Rio Santa Maria Formosa: a congestion of boats carrying loads of wood, a *sandalo* loading empty *chianti* bottles, and behind closed shutters a most terrible quarrel taking place. Two men shouting and thumping. At any moment I expected the shutters to fly open and one of them to be pitched into the canal. But what is the point of eavesdropping on a row in dialect?

so Ruskin didn't understand all those hundreds of Baroque heads—grotesques, he called them—that we find carved everywhere



FRAGMENTS: ONE

upon the keystones of arches? Well, today I was walking down a side canal, which was quite deserted. Suddenly, as I passed, from a window opposite out flew a bucket of slops. Startled, I looked up, and there was not a living soul to be seen, but on the keystone above the window a grinning head of an old man with its tongue lolling out.

CRY from the heart : August 6th : *sirocco*. Hot and wet. Limp. Rain. Slimy underfoot. Caught a chill. Coughing. Also food poisoning. Oh, for the shrill cold north, the clean wind, the bracing air!



## *Animals*

VENICE is a paradise for lovers of all sorts and for love of many kinds, but though the lover of horses may be disappointed to find only horses of bronze, the lover of cats may find a thrill in every dark alley—as well as an equally exciting pang of anguish at the sight of a dead one, forlorn, in a side canal. Cats, which are traditionally finicky about water, find Venice a trying place, and are said to be eventually driven to distraction and to suicide in the canals. Be that as it may, they abound in Venice, and I am told that before the war there were forty thousand of them; and though most of them met a horrid fate during that period, today, like rabbits, possessing extraordinary powers of propagation, they seem, like everything else, to be achieving a kind of inflation. Soon there will be more cats than ever.

By the way, what an interesting thing is a cat census—how is it taken, and how do the results finally check with the increase of kittens over suicides that must have occurred during the census period? Do cat lovers enter in the names of their cats—how exotic they must be in Venice!—the number of litters, preference for fish over mice, the great rat eaters, the pigeon fanciers? Civil servants, who love to pile up such delightful facts about life in order to astonish the layman later on in an idle hour, must have had a wonderful time counting the cats. (This is truly in the Venetian spirit and I only hope it will be possible to compile many other different kinds of census as time goes on; for instance, how nice it would be to know just how many fragments of glass there are in the chandeliers of Venice, how many art-historians come here in any one season and what kind of fish they live on, how many pinnacles there are in Venice, how many tins of metal polish are used every year to polish up the blades of the gondolas, or, how long is the life of a rubber stamp in the Questura Centrale, and how many officials in that building have been waiters just a week before, like the one I found who took an hour and a half to fill in a useless form which asked for the birth date of my maternal grandfather and what was my mother's

maiden name, a form which remains in my possession to this day because the police never bothered to collect it. . . .) But let us not think too much about what cats eat in Venice: especially not of the thousands of mice, which makes one shudder: at least they are invisible. I have a shrewd suspicion that the reason for the pandemonium of bells in Venice during the night is really to frighten away the mice and to give the cats a brief respite from their labours.

Venetian cats are very small and very lean, and some have an ethereal beauty that goes with the excessive use of marble in the buildings: snow white, with grey paws, lemon eyes, pink noses and ears. Others are exotically variegated, as befits a race of animals who have lived for a thousand years in a city at the crossroads between East and West: they all have oriental eyes and oriental manners: an ancestor may have come back with Marco Polo, from a Persian palace, from a bazaar at Alexandria, from a Greek island where a Venetian pirate put in for water. . . . But whatever their mixture, they have their devotees, and there are Venetians who apparently prefer them to human beings, as in our own country. There is one charming picture that takes place in the evenings in the Piazza San Marco, of a youth who might have been a model for Carpaccio, who brings his cat to the promenade nestling comfortably in his purple shirt—a grey tabby with green eyes, against his sunburnt skin. . . . Another picture, quite startling, of a hunchback on the Riva degli Schiavoni, who feeds six cats out of six separate pieces of paper, three tabbies, two black, one plain grey, every evening in an old Gothic doorway plastered with tattered posters.

While the cats of Venice, as usual, live as a race apart, elegant, pernickety, selfish and remote, the dogs of Venice, mercifully fewer in number, share our lives with almost human intimacy, though here, where everything is teased into the exotic by art, they are transformed into a third sex, for, in a city where there are neither sheep to be rounded up nor rabbits to be hunted, the dogs live as luxurious but useless members of the family, purely decorative, lovable and flattering. The little pet dogs of Carpaccio are still here, lingering on from the fifteenth century, with bald bodies, hair on head and feet and a waving plume on the tail. Poodles abound, but do not have the Parisian cut but a Renaissance cut, so that they could still accompany a lady of that period or look well against a tapestry. There are many examples also of those effeminate

little creatures we see in the pictures of Longhi, lap dogs, small and silken with sharp teeth, who accompanied the fop in embroidery and periwig, and lived in rooms with green lacquer furniture. Wolf-hounds in Venice lend themselves admirably to representations of the Lion of St. Mark. A few days ago I saw one in this rôle, with mane around the ears, neck and shoulders, shaven body and legs, and the tail shaved almost to the end, except for a tuft. The great black hounds, used in the past as hunting dogs, are seen still in aristocratic rôle, riding in speedboats up the Grand Canal—great slobbering creatures!—and powerful mastiffs with collars of spikes and studs. . . . Lovers all. . . .

Finally there are the caged birds of Venice—the doves, the love-birds, the canaries and above all the tame blackbirds—for here, in this man-made city, even the birds have to be imported. There is a shop in a narrow alley not far from the Rio dei Meloni on the way to the Rialto, where the crowds always gather to peer through the grills into two dark, low rooms which are entirely inhabited by caged birds. There is the dry smell of feathers, the rattle of bird seed and an endless twittering, gurgling and squeaking. I have never yet seen the shopkeeper, and the shop is always dark, as though the hundreds of birds lived untended in a cellar. But once on the balconies, in their ornate, gilded show cages among the flowers and the climbing plants, the birds live happily in the sun and join in the general commotion of the streets. Blackbirds are especial favourites, and all day long changing groups of passers-by will halt under their balconies and whistle a short tune to them which they answer faithfully, with extraordinary sweetness and roundness. . . . The cats, dogs and birds of Venice are more in harmony with the architecture than the humans, for their appearance has changed little down the centuries: they are the only live things from the past. Only the monkeys and especially the peacocks are missing.



## A Palace

NEXT to men themselves, the most fascinating study is the lumber they leave behind. . . . It is less ghoulish to live among the lumber than to live in a cemetery, for whereas few people would want to live with the mummies of their ancestors, many people find it very comforting to live with their old furniture. There is a curious excitement in sleeping in old beds in which people were born and have died, in expectantly opening old cupboard doors, in drinking from old wine-glasses other lips have touched, or in decorating one's garden with old statues which have looked upon so many vanished afternoons. So deep and profound is this love of the antique that almost all nations have practised it in an endeavour not only to establish their own connection with the past but to clutch frantically at memory, for memory is our only safeguard against the passage of time. So ingrained is this extremely comforting habit of collecting the remains of past ages, that it is a marvel that any new art has been produced at all. There is no doubt about it, however much we argue to the contrary, that antiques are of more emotional value to the majority of people than the works of their contemporaries, and thus the work of dead artists and craftsmen has nearly always been of more cash value than the work of those still living. Our own time suffers from this conservatism of taste no less than other periods (even the Romans, practical as they were, collected the antiques of their Etruscan forebears, and from the Greeks, and in their later phases developed a passion for collecting Egyptian obelisks, even though at that time they had no clue to the inscriptions engraved upon them), so that today as vogue follows vogue the antiques of the world travel across continents and oceans in a constant stream of packing-cases, as though mankind were in a state of permanent house moving, while the creations of living artists lie idle in their studios and workshops, waiting for time and death to hallow them. Vast sums of money pass through the dealers' hands to pay for the productions of past centuries, while artists working today—who as we might logically expect are producing the "antiques" of the

future—are left to scratch out a living as best they may. Today, as the æsthetic sense declines in an age more interested in machines than works of art, the productions of artists and artist-craftsmen are fewer in number than at any other time in history. In a few centuries to come little will remain of our age to be collected, except a litter of broken machines, with which no sensible person will want to furnish his rooms, or, occasionally, a curious picture or two that will give little clue either to the appearance of our age or little comfort to the collector unless he be a psychologist. Scrap iron, samples of concrete and plastic, and faded photographs may be the chief relics of our age, and thus we may confidently expect that the antique dealer of the future will be reduced to penury and the trade ruined, or else relegated to museums as it should be. (I cannot resist the temptation to recount how a well-known art dealer—who, to give him his due, makes a good living out of the more curious kinds of contemporary art—paid me the wonderful compliment when he came to see my pictures of prophesying that my work might be of more value when I am dead than it is now when I am alive by saying, putting his hand on my shoulder and looking into my still-living eyes: “Never destroy anything! All these things look so well in retrospective exhibitions!”) But there is one healthy sign which I must record in favour of our own age, and that is that people today hardly ever prefer to ride about in an early motor car or a balloon—except for fun—when they can buy a new one or go for a ride in the latest airliner. So it may well be, as the Machine Age progresses and the artist is transformed into an engineer’s draughtsman, that in two or three generations from now people will only sit in chairs designed in their own time and not in chairs ranging from one hundred to four hundred years old as they do now. . . .

These thoughts are provoked by the sight of one of the major Venetian palaces now in use as a vast antique shop, and are particularly disturbing to a professional artist alive to the difficulties confronting contemporary art. For if the gondoliers are perturbed that the motorboats are doing them out of business, the modern artist must be equally perturbed at the sale of antiques. It is impossible to remain entirely unmoved by the spectacle of reproduction “antiques” organized in this palace on the scale of a small though delightfully mad-happy factory, where furniture is made and pictures are painted in long dead styles to the accompaniment of



snatches from opera and blithesome lagoon ditties. Despair is tempered with amusement, as well as with admiration for the genuine antiques and the technical cleverness of the reproductions. It is all part of the spectacle of modern Venice, living quite blatantly on the productions of its past. If the supplies run out, new ones are made. . . .

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THE gateway to the palace is at the end of a rather dingy alley, and except for one or two decayed ornaments and slabs of peeling heraldry there is little to indicate the splendours beyond the gate. Once inside the roomy courtyard of the palace, the eye is immediately astonished by the sight of some few thousand pieces of massed statuary, large pieces and small, groups of figures and animals, huge urns, garden ornaments, dozens of fountains, spare arches, loose balustrades, detached balconies, pieces of wrought iron—come like refugees from the past with all their baggage, fleeing to the safety of some ancient embassy from a revolution of taste. Surrounded by a medley of cherubs, rustic figures, gods and goddesses and characters from the *Commedia dell' Arte* a joiner is busily making an "antique" cabinet in the sun. In an archway close by, in a similar setting, yet screened from the direct rays by a cluster of detached marble columns, is another man, an artist, putting the tinted glazes—synthetic dirt of ages—on to a large painting of a romantic scene in the manner of Guardi. On a bench improvised upon the backs of two pink lions another is mending a great Venetian lamp, fitting new windows and retouching the gilding, while threading in and out of the crowd of marble witnesses, and among the urns and archways hung with Virginia creeper, is a constant procession of singing youths, carrying upon their heads cabriole-legged chairs, tables, cabinets, vases, pieces of gilding or bales of precious damasks, like the figures in a Roman triumph. The triumph, of course, is purely Venetian, and to judge by the great hum, by the sense of optimism and enjoyment, the triumph is in full swing. Occasionally a door opens and out come one or two aproned workmen on their way to another part of the building; a woman appears at a window, shouts something down into the courtyard and then goes in again. For the space of half an hour, when they are turned out, a band of little girls come into the courtyard and make garlands of leaves to trim up themselves and the statues. . . . (And here am I, sitting in

the shade making a drawing, until the ink in my pen runs out. I try to supplement it by refilling with water from a puddle, but it comes too weak and I have to abandon the drawing for the day. The sun, moreover, is moving the shadows too quickly over the figure of the wood-nymph—whose arms terminate in bunches of leaves instead of hands. . . .)

All around the courtyard under the arches are the gaunt, bare rooms of the ground floor and the dark vaults of the cellars and one-time kitchens. They have square window spaces, unglazed, but with heavy iron grilles, which give glimpses of the bright canal beyond, with swiftly moving brown figures of passing boatmen. These rooms are stacked with more antiques, arranged round the walls like figures in a mausoleum, or else the scene might be in some utterly forgotten museum where the custodians have entirely given up their vigilant dusting and allowed spiders, rats, bats and pigeons to take their place. The horrid vaults are haunted by cats, quite a score of them—unless they are the same which reappear—all with eyes of shining emeralds, living out some life among the antiques. Perhaps they are the souls of the builders of this palace come to live again like outcasts in their own cellars, a palace now disgraced and full of the wrong statues in the wrong places.

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A SIMILAR sense of not-unhappy madness pervades the rooms upstairs. This palace was built in the High Renaissance style in 1539, and was the home of a famous cardinal. It is now filled with a motley array of furniture, paintings and statuary of many periods, so that all is incongruous, without order and absurd. Wandering through the twilight of these shuttered rooms, I seem to be alone but for the thronging ghosts. I am startled by my own dim reflection in smoky mirrors, and watched by eyes from portraits on the walls. . . . With an absurdity which equals my surroundings, I sit to do my writing on a bishop's throne of eighth-century workmanship, in a square corner chamber built by Sansovino, of grey, pink and white marble. Above me the coffered ceiling rises swiftly to a roof lantern and the slanting sunbeams fall sharply on the inlaid pavement, and on either side I look down two vanishing perspectives of darkened rooms, through a receding series of identical doorways. Two life-size statues of negroes, holding up huge candles wired for electricity are kneeling nearby, while on every possible

pediment and cornice of the room are rows of alien busts. Only the noise of a gramophone and bursts of talk from the street break in on the silence of the palace.

The ceilings of the rooms and a few of the fireplaces seem to be all that remain of the original decorations. One chamber—I cannot ask its name for there is no one about!—has an unusual ceiling: a *pergola* design, overgrown with painted orange and olive trees, with sweeping rushes and amongst them, hosts of birds and water fowl. Near the Sansovino room is a small cabinet of two rooms in pale pink and white stucco—evidently a bathroom, but now stacked with lacquered chairs in the Chinese style, baroque lamps, glass paintings and, in the shelves, a set of eighteenth-century Venetian wood carvings of street beggars, more tattered than ever with age, and sundry pieces of gilded altar furniture, brackets for holding the Epistle and Gospel and a broken monstrance. From the windows a view into a house with a scanty roof garden, where a woman is bullying children. . . . On a console table near the Cardinal's Chapel are a pair of Staffordshire dogs, exactly like a pair I have at home, and above them, of all things, a painting by Sargent. The Cardinal's Chapel is a small and tidy place, still fitted with appropriate furniture, but dark, with the shutters drawn. I am deceived by a wall panel which, in the dreamy state the whole empty palace has produced, I imagine to be a small baroque painting of an Ascension, but which turns out to be a panel of highly figured Sienna marble. . . . The Cardinal's Bedroom next door is still fitted up as such, but with an enormous four-poster and a host of incongruous cabinets and stools and writing tables. Behind the bed is a great Hunt of Diana in tapestry which may be French, while the ceiling is of stucco arabesques in the style of the Villa Madama, in a bad state of repair.

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AND then I discover that I am not the only person in the upstairs rooms of the palace. In the cardinal's dressing closet, next to the bedroom, a young man is seated at a desk of red leather, among the same mad welter of antiques. He is poring over books and making notes. We startle each other and then fall into conversation. . . . I discover that he is a student and uses this room, next to the Cardinal's Bedroom, in which to study hydraulics and algebra!

## THE LION AND THE PEACOCK

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THIS young man, studying the science of hydraulics—his modern books littered over the cracking upholstery, surrounded by antiques in a derelict and ruinous Venetian palace—does he not seem to typify the youth of Italy? Their past hangs so heavily about them—no nation seems to have produced such great quantities of art, such thousands of splendid palaces and buildings. In this stifling atmosphere, even of the domestic heritage of Catholic civilization, the past is still potent: it becomes almost insignificant to learn modern sciences. In England after our glorious industrial revolution we quickly set to work to obliterate the past: our towns and cities have been transformed in a hundred years and we have precious little left to show of our own Augustan Age (and most of that is to be found in Dublin). But this young man studying among his overwhelming past, how will he come into this century? How will Italy solve the problems of excessive art?

## *Restoration of Mosaics*

THIS morning I met my charming and courteous Venetian friend who is in charge of the restoration of the mosaics of St. Mark's. We had made this arrangement some time ago when sitting over coffee in the artists' café in the Campo San Barnabo one blue and velvety evening. How long things take to work themselves out in Venice. . . . We met in the atrium by those intriguing pierced marble grills under the picture of the Building of the Tower of Babel. The major domo, with his rod, eighteenth-century hat and rather shabby black knee breeches, was busily performing his duties of making the ladies cover up their nakedness—a powerful and threatening watchdog—and the sightseers were streaming in in what can only truthfully be described as a mob. Quite suddenly, as though spirited away, my friend took me through a little bronze door and we climbed up a narrow and difficult staircase where all the steps were a different height and arranged very steeply. At the top was a series of vaulted rooms used as studios and workshops, looking for all the world like those crowded engravings of craftsmen's dens of the fourteenth century. But these are the only artists' studios in the world that have a view down the Piazzetta with a glimpse of the Adriatic through the twin columns of Venice. How nice to spend one's life up here till one's beard went white! However, my friend was neither old nor white, nor had he a beard, and he soon fell to scurrying around enthusiastically among his benches and his boxes of coloured marbles and glass, explaining this and that, and handling precious slabs of priceless mosaic newly peeled off the vaults of the Basilica. I must say here how helpful these people are to visiting artists, how welcoming they are, and painstaking. Nothing could be more cheering than to be welcomed into this place, the very heart of secrets of Byzantium.

But I must get down to the business of describing the process used in the restoration of the mosaics, which I hope will be as clear to you at the end of it as it is to me who saw the whole process, though it may not be, as craftsmen's recipes are worse to

understand than cookery books. Still, I think I must record it in all its details, for I don't suppose that many people poke their noses as far into St. Mark's as this. . . .

The craft of mosaic is essentially very simple : it is merely a matter of laying coloured stones and bits of glass into a wet cement to make a picture or design. If marble and stones are used the pictures will retain their colours for ever, and these, used in combination with pure gold fired into sheets of glass, create mosaics which are quite permanent for just so long as they stay in their bed of cement. The coloured marbles and glass can be made into sheets of any thickness, and the Byzantine mosaicists used sheets slightly over a quarter of an inch in thickness, sometimes about half an inch. The sheets are then cut, either with a chisel-ended hammer or heavy shears, into small cubes and arranged according to colour gradations in boxes for easy sorting. The marbles always possess one flat surface, but the various kinds of coloured glass often have a nicely undulating surface, and when gold is fired into glass it varies slightly in colour according to the quality of the gold and the colour of the glass. The range of colours in the marbles is very subtle, from pure white, through pinks and reds, down to browns, yellows, greys and blacks, but always very powdery and bright. With glass it is possible to fire the sharper colours, especially very deep blacks and blues, intense reds, shrill greens and yellows. The marbles are usually dull in finish and the glass very shiny, but with these simple materials a very great variety of colours and surface textures can be obtained by endless combinations of the *tesseræ*, as these cut stones and glass are called. They are placed side by side, piece by piece, until the whole picture is built up. The final surface of the picture can be quite flat or can undulate like a sheet blowing in a slight wind, or else the two methods can be combined and some parts can be flat and other parts at slight angles so that the surfaces catch the light. The undulating surface of the mosaics in St. Mark's was fully exploited by the artists not only on flat walls but on cupolas, the under sides of arches and vaults; even the corners and angles are rounded, so that the light constantly plays over the undulations and increases the shine. The whole scheme is laid upon a background of pure gold inlaid in glass, which creates an effect of richness quite indescribable. Thus the mosaics are always glittering from some angle, for even in the gloom of a dark day they shine, and when the roving shafts of sunlight catch them they

flash and appear to move, and, as one walks around the Basilica, the whole surface is lively to the eye. Unlike paintings, which have been a constant source of worry to artists for thousands of years, especially since we abandoned the use of painting with egg tempera, mosaics do not discolour or lose their brilliance. Certain chemicals do, however, rise up to the surface from the lime and cements and give a bloom which appears to make the *tesserae* lose their colour. The greatest and most devastating accident that can happen to mosaic is the perishing of the cement through the action of damp or simple disintegration. The *tesserae* lose their grip, and if they fall down in any great areas the original mosaic is lost for good; others are put back in their places which are never the same in quality and which have been known to be very poor indeed. For close on a thousand years the fabric of St. Mark's has stood the strain of time and weathering, both inside and out, but naturally the building has to be carefully watched, and we might assume that if historic calamities do not interfere it will stand for an equal length of time, for it is kept in a permanent state of repair by a small band of workmen who spend their lives taking out pieces of crumbling fabric and inserting fresh. In the case of the mosaics the artists are constantly running their hands over the surface and gently pressing to see if the pictures are coming away from the brick underneath. Unlike the rest of the building, where new pieces are inserted, these faulty areas are then removed intact, cleaned and replaced in new plaster. That is the principle of the operation: but now let me go into more detail and tell you what I saw them doing with the mosaics of St. Mark's.

First of all, even before the loose pieces are removed, a record is made of the design. A sheet of white paper, about eighteen inches square, of a strong though porous texture, is laid on the wall and water brushed on to it. As the paper becomes soaked it stretches and falls back into the undulations of the mosaic, and in this wet condition it is soundly beaten into the surface with a large stippling brush, thus making, virtually, a *papier mâché* cast of every single piece of mosaic underneath. The paper also, by this time being saturated, has become transparent like tracing paper, and it is possible to see the details of the design underneath very clearly. The artist then traces in watercolour the main lines of the drawing—of the masses of drapery, of a face, a scroll of lettering, a building, a bird, animal or tree or whatever happens to be within the square. No

masses of colour are laid in at this stage: the tracing is merely line work, though the colour scheme of the mosaics is very simple and the lines are either blue or black or red to further help the identification later on. This square of paper is then numbered and marks placed around the edges for registration, that is, to make it fit precisely into other squares of the design when they are made. It is allowed to dry off a little, and then, when merely damp and semi-stiff again, it is carefully peeled off the wall, retaining on its surface a perfect cast of every single piece of marble and glass and all the eccentricities of the surface. Gradually these paper casts are taken of the whole vast areas of the mosaics of St. Mark's, whether they are due for restoration or not, and the sections are numbered for piecing together. Obviously these records are only made at the same time as restoration is in progress, for the business of erecting scaffolding in a busy cathedral and at such great heights cannot be undertaken lightly.

Next the paper casts are collected together and taken into the studios, where they are given a few coats of shellac and methylated spirit, which make them more permanent and stiff. Then on a large board various sections of the design are built up from the numbered squares which are glued into position, and these are coloured up with distemper colours and gold paint, *tessera* by *tessera*, to match up with the original colours. The results are astonishingly accurate, for each little cube of stone and glass is raised up in the paper cast, and when pieced together they make perfect records of the pictures, from which the mosaicists can work in their endless task of restoration or for the purpose of study in schools and museums.

But let us return to the scaffolding to follow the actual work on the wall surfaces, for so far I have only mentioned the making of facsimile studies in paper and paint. Upon the loose areas of mosaic is first *pasted* a piece of strong, thin paper, and over that a piece of scrim cloth, slightly stronger than butter muslin. This, like the previous paper section, is marked and numbered but allowed to dry thoroughly while still in position. When dry the area is cut away from its place, where it has been for centuries, and once more taken back into the studio. Thus the work divides itself into two—that which is done on the wall and that which is done in the studio. On the wall the workmen chip away and remove the Byzantine plaster, which comes away very easily with the tool as it is usually in a powdery condition. Their plaster was white and fine, made



from marble dust and burnt lime with chopped straw and hair to bind it together, and this the workmen dig away right down to the brickwork underneath, which is left in a thoroughly clean condition. Meanwhile, in the studio the artists carefully clean the remnants of plaster off what is the back of the picture, for, if you remember, the design is now stuck face downwards on paper, and they insert new stones where the old ones may have broken, checking up constantly with the casts they have already made. When these sections of the cleaned mosaics are ready they are carried back to their old places on the walls. The walls during their absence have been repaired and laid with a new cement which is deeply scored to receive the new plaster. The plaster is then laid in sections, large enough for working on in a day, and the pieces of cleaned mosaic—still stuck on their sheets of paper—are laid firmly into it, area by area, each square of paper fitting snugly up to the others, marks and numbers registering accurately.

After many weeks, or possibly months, according to drying conditions, when the plaster is set and the paper is thoroughly dry, the scrim and paper are removed by washing, leaving the old mosaic now soundly stuck to the wall in a bed of new plaster and cement.

In examining certain areas of the Byzantine plaster from which the mosaics had been lifted before it was chipped away down to the brick work, we are given a sight that few people see—the original drawing of the Byzantine artist which he had roughly sketched into the plaster while it was wet before he started his day's work. He must have worked from a small design, but not from cartoons, and then, as in true fresco painting, laid as much plaster as he could fill in a day. On to this he made his vivid rough sketch to get the enlargement in proportion and to serve as a guide, and into it he placed his stones, thousand upon thousand of small cubes of glass and marble, until gradually, day after day, the whole vast schemes were completed. This method of working is very characteristic of twelfth- and thirteenth-century mosaics, and accounts for the extraordinary freshness of the rendering. It is a method that is quite spontaneous, for apart from the small design (over which there must have been some pretty heated ecclesiastical arguments) the work on the walls was laid in freshly day by day. The real act of creation took place in the wet plaster, not at the design stage. By this method too they were able to make the wall surface undulate, and to press and tilt the *tesseræ* as they wished, to catch the light.

The later mosaics of the Renaissance, which so disfigure St. Mark's, especially on the front of the Basilica, were not done in this way. For them an artist as important as Tintoretto would paint a large picture in oil paint in the ordinary way, and from it a full-size paper cartoon was made in reverse. On to this the bits of mosaic were stuck, matching up the colours quite mechanically from the painting. The cartoon, cut into manageable sections, was then lifted into position and embedded in plaster, and washed off when the mosaic was set. But the final effect was never seen until the last operation, the wall was quite uniformly flat and uninteresting, and what we see in the end is only a mechanical reproduction of an oil painting, a rendering in marble of effects obtained by a brush. It is doubtful if the artist himself ever touched his own design. They are only interpretations, not original works.

It is interesting, before I leave this subject, to sum up the effects made by the two methods of working. If we stand on one of the galleries and look at a part which has both Byzantine and Renaissance mosaics side by side, the difference is astonishing. The early mosaics are clear, strong and readable for hundreds of feet. Every action is telling and every part of the design remains visible without that deterioration of drawing which takes place as distance increases. The main shapes—for instance, the shapes of figures—are all conceived in silhouettes, and there is no overlapping or attempts at real perspective. Details, such as leaves on trees, the patterns on a robe, are all enclosed within this shape and function as decorative patterns and increase the texture of the design. But the later mosaics, in which, of course, there was a great difference in mental conception, nearly always lose this readable quality, except in the case of very simple objects in isolated positions. They become nebulous and muddled and look quite grey and colourless when compared with the early ones. Their concern with perspective, in the drawing of quickly receding limbs and flowing draperies, in the drawing of naturalistic flowers and shrubs in landscapes, or in the rendering of vast areas of boiling clouds upon which, perforce, these figures must be standing, and their overall attempts at real lighting and display of intricate emotions on people's faces, all conspire to abuse the medium and produce failures. For even though all these admittedly more subtle effects are possible in paint, they become ridiculous when done in stones, especially when interpreted at second or third hand. The art of Byzantium was perfectly rendered

## RESTORATION OF MOSAICS

in mosaic, the art of the Renaissance was perfectly rendered in paint, but I have never yet seen a Renaissance mosaic which is really successful. I should think Tintoretto had a surprise when he saw what they had done to his "Paradiso" painting above the atrium. It is coarse and unlovely even to modern eyes.



## Idling

UNDER the bellies of the Bronze Horses of St. Mark's I met a Viennese artist. As is the way in Venice, where people are always just about to leave, we were very soon down to essentials: he wanted to show me his paintings. I thought at first that this would mean a trek to some distant studio in the heat, but no—he had them all with him downstairs! He'd left them with the beadle at the entrance to the Basilica. He went down and returned with quite a heavy roll of canvases and paper, and between us we spread out the pictures on the floor of the atrium roof, inside the cathedral. Perhaps this was the first exhibition of early twentieth-century art to be held in St. Mark's, if only on the floor! (I must admit that among these sweeping golden vaults, and immediately beneath the enormous stretch of Tintoretto's *Paradiso* mosaic, this work, reminiscent of Paul Klee, made me feel rather like a pavement artist. . . . Such quick, twitching statements of modern pain—and Viennese pain too, from that once-splendid city now split in quarters!)

Then we spent an hour discovering that we held the same opinion about the mosaics and the pavement (unusual to find two artists in agreement!); and yet we disagreed about one thing: he wanted to pull down all the Renaissance mosaics and to fill their places with gold, whereas I wanted to leave them, because I have come to accept the less good with the very good. Also I am old enough to know that what would go into their places if they were removed would certainly not be plain gold. . . . Later, in highly critical mood, we went to see an exhibition of contemporary paintings, one of those ever-so-frequent shows of now universal pseudo-French Impressionism, of fluffy, clotted paintings, befuddled and pretty. (Every European country from Scandinavia to the Balkans has been infected by the School of Paris—pretty tufts of coloured wool everywhere, applied with glue! Oh, for a breath of fresh air to blow it all away. . . .)

All evening we wandered about, and completely ruined our dinner with pessimism. We discovered little except that the position

of the painter today is similar in all countries. . . . The half-declared fear of science, the futility of industrial society, the sense of isolation of the artist and the knowledge that art could be dispensed with tomorrow and few would note its passing. . . . My generation of artists at least had some uneasy connection with the nineteenth century, had a backward glimpse down the vista. We grew up among the broken idols of the 'twenties, slumbered through the uneasy afternoon-dream of surrealism, and lived through the intensely felt pacifism of the 'thirties. Then we were plunged into the nightmare of a war which brought us face to face with human behaviour the like of which had not been known since medieval times. But the war was not cleansing and has only driven us into romanticism, where we are still connected with the past by education and tradition, and, if not entirely iconoclastic, we show little faith and have little confidence. But this young artist, coming to manhood after the Second World War, has had the unfortunate experience of growing straight from innocence to cynicism without any middle period of idealism. The past seems little to his generation except a scratching ground, and they have taken refuge in abstractions and the art of idle moments. Yet they show all the self-confidence of eclecticism, and allied to a new architecture and new design in the crafts we may still live to see a twentieth-century style. . . . Artists today have still one thing in common: their passionate belief in the validity of the imagination as a way of life. We are struggling to preserve ourselves as a human type, at a time when men are less interested in humanism but are forging ahead with astonishing experiments in physics, both on earth and soon, we are told, among the planets. It would be a sad anticlimax to centuries of grandeur if artists were to end merely as entertainers or at best as occupational therapists.

\* \* \*

WE paced the Molo backwards and forwards (each hour I remembered some rusty German phrase of gloom that I thought I had left behind among the litter of my student days) until under the arcades of the Palazzo Ducale at midnight we parted. As Verdi's *Requiem* was at that moment being solemnly unravelled in the courtyard of the Palace to a crowd of fashionables, I did not know whether I was taking part in a drama or a melodrama. At least we had shown each other that the splendours of Venice had not blinded us to our own century. . . . In the early hours of the morning Fritz was to leave

## IDLING

Venice, with his roll of paintings under his arm, to return to the Russian Zone of Vienna. . . . But all Venice seemed in sultry mood that night, for when I got home there was a row in progress under my window. It flared up like a thunderstorm and rolled on till half-past one, till I was sick of it. Gondoliers were quarrelling violently in gibberish, with the usual crowd of interested young men looking on. . . . Idling all day, idling all night. . . . Later, everybody moved off, the day worn out at last, but just as sleep was falling, the bells struck up again. . . .

## Opera

THE staging of opera out of doors is always one of the delights of the summer season in Italy, and in no other country is opera pursued with such fierce enthusiasm, nor in any other country are the nights so balmy, so less likely to damp enthusiasm. How lucky these people are to be able to sit up half the night under the stars, fanned by gentle breezes, hearing and seeing these extraordinary performances. In Italian opera one comes to see more plainly than ever the great trend of Italian life towards the theatrical: Italy is an open-air theatre, and though there may be grim goings-on behind the scenes, the best in Italian life is the staging of a great show. The static arts of architecture, painting and sculpture have been used merely as a background, century after century, for the continuous performance of Italian life. The cities, with all their magnificent buildings, secular and ecclesiastical, the squares, the avenues, have all been used as a slowly changing permanent set for the play of history. Art and life have been integrated. . . . Visitors to Italy from the north often make the mistake of divorcing the arts from the life lived among them, and with all seriousness tend to regard architecture, painting and sculpture as subjects sealed off within themselves. The palaces, squares, churches, the collections of works of art are looked upon as something separate, whereas they are meaningless apart from the life lived in them. The sun and the climate, which draw all things outwards, have produced a nation of extraverts, and from the cradle to the grave a man parades. He is on show. He works out the drama of his life as an actor, be it an idyll, a tragedy or a melodrama. Thus his life is a public affair most of the time: his lines are spoken and sung in a melodious language, accompanied by extravagant gestures and dressing up. Perhaps this is the key to all life and art in Italy—even to religious art, which is, after all, only an attempt to prolong the life of Italy into eternity. . . . (With us life is different, essentially withdrawn, non-violent and melancholy. We solve the problem of material living, and then live quietly, without ostentation. The extraverts among us, unless they



be admirals, politicians or great sportsmen, are frowned upon, and undue expression of emotion is looked upon as bad taste, while artists, if they survive at all, are nearly always romantics. Our lives are truly hyperborean compared with this life in the sun, though that is not to say that we haven't our own compensating qualities and excellences.) Italian life is exterior, uninhibited, rational—and at all times demonstrative, and thus opera, which to us, with our withdrawn attitude to life, is often comical and sometimes quite ridiculous, is, to the Italians, a dramatized version of incidents taken from real life, set to music. It is one further example of that remarkable ability of the Italians to transpose life into art, which both mirrors and exalts ordinary existence. Opera, and indeed most of the arts—up to this present calamitous century—have been pursued in Italy with the seriousness which we now devote to cricket, football, horse-racing and golf.

To see Puccini's opera "Otello" in the open air in Venice is to witness a strange transformation, an elevation of ordinary life into the realms of art, as reminiscences of the Italy of the past—so rich in artistic intrigues, stagey assassinations, decorative poisonings and dramatic suicides—or to the realm of wish-fulfilment, where, in the heightened emotional key so well produced by hysterical singing and haunting refrains, the love affairs of ordinary men and women take on the importance of those of heroes and heroines. Moreover, this sense of super-reality is further heightened by the continuation of the paste-board scenery of the opera into the real architecture beyond the stage and around the square temporarily converted into an amphitheatre. In the magic of stage lighting it becomes exceedingly difficult to distinguish between the real and the temporary scenery of Venice: the Gothic and Renaissance palaces round the square and the church tower above merge to such an extent that we are taken into the opera itself in a way no ordinary indoor theatre can ever achieve. . . . Above are the stars and the moon, while below is this fantastic story about a handkerchief that ends so grimly with murder and suicide. . . .

Open-air opera has its diverting side, which is half the joy of the performance. The intervals are extremely long, and during that time we in the audience are given the opportunity to observe ourselves, to make criticisms of dresses and appearances, to make remarks of appraisal, to gush with emotion over a friend at the other side of the amphitheatre, to snub enemies, to bow, to walk arm in

arm intimately up and down the aisle in front of the whole audience pretending we are alone, to show off jewellery, arms and necks, to show how delicately ice-cream or Coca-cola can be taken in evening clothes. Now is the time to disturb Italian intellectual friends who are busy blowing their own trumpets, or to sit with an American friend who with great wit can point out things about other Americans in the audience that only an American knows. . . . In fact, during the intervals the audience spills over and enjoys itself. It is also given an opportunity of watching the scene-shifting, for as there is no drop curtain and the floodlights which shine into the audience are not completely blinding, the stage is still visible; and it is often difficult to decide which is more amusing, the scene in the audience or the scene-shifting. In Rome elephants are sometimes brought on to the stage, in Verona horses and chariots, but on this occasion, where no such creatures play a part, the scene-shifting is confined to the removal of architecture and furnishings. Scores of men, in their vests, wrestle with enormous paste-board palm trees, remove whole staircases bodily, lift mighty Gothic arches, bring in columns, furniture, ships, ferns, balustrades, and then, for the last act, arrange Desdemona's bed—a real four-poster, with diaphanous drapes—her bedding, dressing-table and various pieces of her bedroom walls. Meanwhile throughout the endless replacing of objects—as though the stage designer's drawings had been lost and everyone put his thing down just where it pleased his fancy—the singers drift around discussing their acting positions with each other: where lately they had been quarrelling violently in the opera, now they are friends. . . .

After the last turbulent act, of praying, of screaming, of smothering, of anguish, of suicide, during which the canary sings its haunting refrain, the absurd word *fazzoletto*, handkerchief, is heard for the last time, and the audience is struck dumb with emotion and astonishment; after the bursts of applause, the kissing, the bowing, the rejoicing at such a delightful performance, we leave the lights and the greasepaint and disperse down the narrow alleys of a deserted Venice, as though we ourselves were walking into the wings. . . .

Venice, after a busy day and the din of the last four hours, is quiet now and secret. The night is still and warm, and the canals are black, without a ripple. We pass under the Sottoportico del Arco Celeste into the Piazza San Marco, and there, at two o'clock in the morning, by moonlight, all other lights extinguished, is the permanent scenery, looking very beautiful indeed and very deserted.

## Interlude

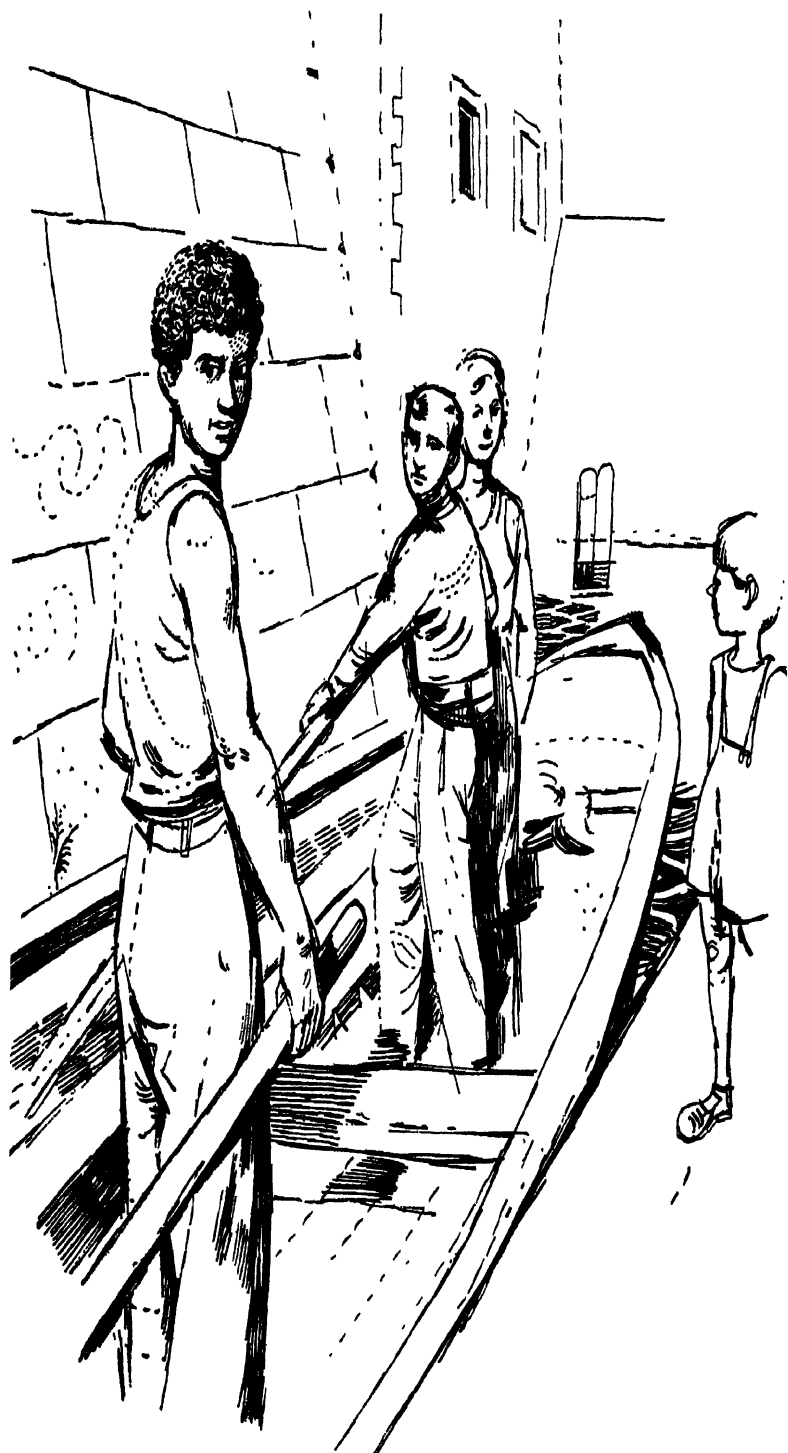
THERE is a madness that sweeps all seaside resorts. It is a desire to be gay, to dance in the light and air, to eat unusual food, to drink, to make love. Sea mists get into the mind and it all ends up in sadness. Venice, being not merely by the sea but *in* the sea, is a city that suffers this delirium not just on its front, as is usually the case, but on every side: is, in fact, enveloped in it. Seaside madness produced Brighton, a town of delightful English eccentricities—rather mild and endearing—of quacks and dealers, crazy individuals, amorous weekends, vaporous sub-religions, with its pier, and above all the regal folly of the Pavilion. No less curious than some of the shops in Venice are those in that airy town on the South Coast, for with the usual antique and second-hand shops in its narrow alleys—streets of surreal delight—are to be found others that are rarely found inland. There is a shop which deals exclusively in rubber faces, with rows and rows of grimacing masks which can be stretched at will in all directions with the finger and thumb. There is a stuffed-kitten shop, and a shop which sells nothing but cork-bungs, bottle stoppers and cork pictures. More curious still were the little slot machines which at one time could be found in certain places in the town, as though they had escaped from the pier. In a little cast-iron alcove, behind a window, what is described as an “Egyptian lady” reclined upon a couch, a stiff little doll of eighteen inches. If you put your penny in the slot, and placed your handkerchief over a small pierced grill at the front, it was gently sprayed with the scent of attar of roses. . . .

There was a Brighton dentist too who, before these days of clinical efficiency, performed behind bead curtains. He had seen better days and was reduced to wearing his evening clothes perpetually, with the patent leather shoes tied up with string. He had the unusual feature of different-coloured eyebrows—one was ginger, one was white, but both were very bushy. His dentist’s chair was an ordinary armchair in olive-green brocaded plush, which, when he wanted to tip the patient back to do the top teeth,

## THE LION AND THE PEACOCK

he would prop up on a heavy family Bible. He worked a foot-drill with a driving belt of knotted string, and it was fascinating to watch the knots go round as the teeth were being drilled. The room was always crawling with children and babies, and he talked incessantly, and was in the habit of lifting up the smallest baby under one arm to peer into the patient's mouth while he drilled with the other. Afterwards, at the end of the operation, he would peel an apple, very slowly, with an engraved silver knife, and offer segments all round. He was described as a good-natured man, but, as he neglected to send out any bills, he is now no more.





## Fragments : Two

BETWEEN the twin towers of the Arsenale sailed the galleons, glittering with gold, pennants fluttering . . . past the row of lions, the statuary, the ornate gates. Today swarms of brown boys climb on the railings of the Bridge of Paradise in front of the towers; they cross themselves and then jump into the water to swim. The lions have become the nursery toys of Venice, old, beloved, worn smooth and shiny by generations of children, with many centuries of changing fashions, pantaloons, breeches, trousers, shorts. The *campo* here is dirty, faded, all glory departed, a rowdy place used for gossip. Beyond, over the high walls, is a mysterious hint of modern industry. I don't know what they make behind those walls today, but it can no longer be pikes, breastplates, helmets and greaves, or men-o'-war, anchors, cannon. And they are most certainly not re-gilding the *Bucintoro*. . . . But at five-thirty, when the sun casts long shadows across the marble gates and the statues turn pink, a factory siren shrieks close at hand, and over the Bridge of Paradise comes a throng of workmen in overalls, tired and grey, with empty luncheon cans. Some come to the little bar at the corner to have a drink and a gossip on their way home, but most of them hurry along the quayside in the direction of the Campo della Bragora. Soon it is quiet again and the children resume their playing on the lions, jump from the bridge and swim in the canal.

ONE comes to know these sultry, clouded mornings when one wakes tired and almost completely drained of energy. The sky is overcast, Venice goes grey, St. Mark's is blanched like a folly made of old coral, the city is moist and horrid; everyone wipes his brow and does as little as possible, moves as little as possible. . . . On days like these, what the English call "The Smells" rise from the side canals and the narrow alleys, like whiffs from a thousand corpses. Venice languishes, gives one a headache, is revolting. Even the

caged birds stop singing and droop on their perches. . . . Peeling walls, dank white washing hanging limp, old unpainted shutters, white marble bones of balconies, arched window frames like the ribs of skeletons, slimy pavements, and the veiled presence of festering garbage. . . . The shops smell, the people smell, the tourists smell. There is no escape from it: even the smell of carnations is disgusting. On such days Venice is like a medieval lazaretto, worse than any other place on earth. Collapse on the nearest pavement—if it is not fouled by pigeon droppings—and wait: there is no escape!

Soon the rain begins, and the dark surface of the canals is pock-marked. The people, mumbling in the crowded alleys, break up their groups and stop their endless grumble about *cento cinquanta* and *due mille lire*, and begin to move rapidly in all directions. Then the rain comes in greater quantities than any municipal water-cart could ever carry, swilling and washing and flooding the lanes and canals, squares and courtyards large and small, the quaysides, the palaces, the people, the tourists. Everything and everybody is unmercifully—or mercifully—*swilled*, to the accompaniment of shattering thunder claps and flashes of lightning. . . .

By this time, being sensible, one is safely digging into a plateful of *gnocchi* with tomato sauce, followed by roast veal, mixed salad and fruit, with *un mezzo rosso*. Then, later, when one awakens up, the miracle has happened! The light is dazzling, the sky is blue, the air is full of delightful scents, St. Mark's bright again in pink and gold. . . . Venice is the most beautiful city in the world!

CAMPO SANTA MARIA FORMOSA: beauty has just passed by. . . . Who by now has not heard of "Titian-red hair"? Well, it is a thing which has to be seen to be believed. It is not ginger and has no hint of gold, but is almost crimson, a warm purple, like old polished copper, sometimes quite dark. Who could resist this, against a brown skin, or against an olive skin with carmine cheeks and lips. . . . Or that other kind of hair, so black that it is blue, or that pale Venetian gold on dark temples?

A DRAGONFLY came to live on my brocaded wallpaper today.



HERE am I sitting in one of the duller squares in Venice, the Campo Daniele Manin, collapsed in the heat, sipping iced *siroppa* and thinking about nothing in particular. The only attractive building is the house at the end of the square, in which Manin lived, painted cherry red, with white marble balconies and architraves and dark green shutters. (I am aware that there is a group of nice Gothic windows behind me, but I am too lazy even to turn my head: this morning is not for ogees and crockets, just for sitting!) In front of Manin's house is a *sandalo* from which two youths are playfully trying to push each other into the canal, there being nothing else to do at the moment. Small knots of people are gathering on either bridge. The youths push and shove, and one, rather wisely, has already taken off his shirt. Quite soon he topples over the side and gets a wetting. He heaves himself back into the boat and there is another struggle, during which they both fall into the canal. . . . Out they come, their clothes sticking close, and climb with agility up the grills of the windows and on to the bridge. The shirtless one, glistening in the sun, enjoying his performance, mounts the parapet, raises his arms as if to dive, and then, to confound everybody, leaps into the air in a sitting position and drops into the canal with a huge splash. The second follows him back into the water, and they spend a further gay ten minutes ducking one another. They help each other out with great courtesy, and, arms entwined, climb glistening on to the bridge. They put their clothes to dry on the parapets in the sun: it is all over, the crowd moves on.

DO you remember those long, long afternoons of childhood when the sunny hours seemed to go on for ever and the bees strayed among the flowers without returning to their hives? Or have you forgotten, now that you are grown up and the day is divided into short periods between meals, and the years pass so rapidly that you wonder if you haven't taken leave of your senses or whether something extraordinary hasn't happened to the equinoxes? Well, in Venice, on these warm marbles, the afternoons are long again, they stretch out for ever: from the noonday commotion of church bells round St. Mark's away into the violet evenings so busy with the bustle of strolling people.

## THE LION AND THE PEACOCK

IN Venetian paintings there is a tendency to run to Arrivals and Departures; that is to say, people are either arriving by water or are just about to go somewhere by water. Comings and goings are always voyages—one *cruises* about Venice, one *travels* about Venice, whereas in London one merely “gets about.” All the water-borne journeys are little pomps; all boating and floating upon water is important. Thus it is an event to take the *vaporetto*, it is an adventure to cross the Grand Canal by *traghetto*, while to journey by gondola is still the most luxurious form of travel in spite of the aeroplane. . . . And it must be nice to look forward to one’s funeral in one of those splendid black and gold gondolas that glide with such awe-inspiring magnificence up the Grand Canal and away over the sea to the Island of the Dead. . . . (On second thoughts, it is better to be upright in one of the following gondolas than prone under a heap of *gladioli* !)

I WENT to see an exhibition of contemporary paintings—one of those many one-man shows of Venetian scenes that look as though Bonnard were working here—and was somewhat surprised to find the floor of the gallery inlaid with gravestones. . . . The gallery was a converted church. In Venice old churches are used for many purposes and have made admirable cinemas. The lurid dramas of Hollywood take place on the spot where once the tabernacle stood. It is curious to see the baroque façades plastered with photographs of screen lovers and to find a box office in the narthex.

THE Lido: the largest hot-water bathing establishment since the Baths of Caracalla.

MOST people go to Venice to escape from the twentieth century. I know of an eminent Venetian whose great passion in life is the London Underground. Seated in his lovely city, he plans imaginary journeys from Kennington Oval to Paddington.<sup>4</sup> . . .

THIS small, exquisite architecture three or four storeys high, this low skyline with occasional outbursts of parapets and domes, of



cornices lively with statues and knobbly spikes—those were the great days! I shall never get used to the mammoth concrete canyons of our present-day cities. I don't like tall buildings or tall people: they make me feel small. That is the simple truth of the matter. Skyscrapers are bad for the human race—they make us into ants. They are no better than hives, packing-cases, egg-boxes. The secret of the great cathedrals is that they do not make us insignificant, they somehow prise open the mind and make us feel expansive; but some great palaces, like the Palazzo Ducale, beat us into submission with their bombast, like meeting a tall, magnificent bully. None of these buildings, however, dwarf us in quite the same way as the tall modern buildings, which are so terrifyingly efficient, so mechanical, so utterly unlovable.

VERY irritated today at the sight of a young priest on a boat. In the crush I was afforded a very intimate view of his tonsure, for the young man only stretched up to my nose and came to a halt immediately in front of it. . . . This sombre manner of hairdressing, which for ever marks a man out as different, is both fascinating and revolting: a mild scarification. *Æsthetically*, perhaps because we have come to accept it, it fits in well with the art of the Church: it is so appropriate, so right for the occasion. To me it seems to be an attempt to make young men old before their time—to imitate artificially the bald pate, the little fringe that we have come to associate with those sullen, glowering old men—so tough, so humourless, so difficult, so without charm—such as we see depicted in the Scrovegni Chapel at Padua, or in so many other paintings of that artistically pure though emotionally chilly period. (There they are, taking part in slow solemnities, crouching with rheum in desolate, stony landscapes over the one small olive bush, or striking the rocks to bring forth into an arid countryside some magic spring of much-needed water. . . . Or else, in some interminable internecine quarrel, when theology was the chief means of passing the intolerable seasons, they are seen splitting each other's bald heads with the jaw bones of asses, and then, in an ecstasy of apparently welcome pain, they are wafted upwards from their vales of woe, helped by a group of frigid minor air sprites, into some formal unimaginative heaven, where at last they find flowers and mild, lilting music. Boredom on

earth, boredom in eternity. . . .) I know now what made me so angry at this young man's tonsure: it was the implicit denial of life, the wastage of youth.

IF travelling by *vaporetto* or lagoon steamer takes one back to the 'nineties, then travelling by gondola takes one back where . . . ? Has any town a method of conveyance which has survived so completely down the centuries, which is so appropriate to the layout of the city? It is the equivalent of going down the Strand in a sedan chair, and yet it is surprisingly modern and not in the least quaint. I can think of no more delightful way of moving about than lying on the cushions of a gondola and gliding—so swiftly it seems—along the canals, viewing the undersides of balconies and the plants cascading over the window sills or seeing the dancing fret of light under the bridges. Lying down thus seems a delightfully abandoned form of exhibitionism after being brought up to travel—demurely almost, and in repressed silence—sitting upright in rows in train and bus. It is a most curious and pleasing sensation to see people from underneath for a change, on bridges and banks, gazing down upon one from parapets and balconies like figures in a baroque ceiling. It is such a languid and satisfactory mode of travel that one is almost tempted to undo one's shoelaces. . . .

THIS endless game with beer-bottle tops! It goes on from about nine in the morning till sundown, week after week, played apparently by the same group of ten-year-olds around the edges of the fountain area in the Piazzetta dei Leoncini. They play in all weathers, except in torrential rain, when they retire between the columns of the Basilica to continue as best they might until they are washed out by the water flooding from the rain spouts. . . . Today, in moderate rain, the game has continued with umbrellas and cloaks. It is now almost dark and they are still playing. . . .

THE boy with the face of a caterpillar is bullied by the owner of the café where I breakfast—during that trying time of the Fixing

## THE LION AND THE PEACOCK

of the Blinds. Every morning he is near to tears, humiliated in front of foreigners. Even though I have trained them to make tea properly and induced them to buy in a stock of real orange marmalade, I really can't stand this caterpillar-misery much longer. The owner does not strike me as being too glad to be alive: he has the misfortune to have pebble glasses. His wife, who slaves at the scalding and hissing coffee machines all day long, is ashen with fatigue, and often burns her arms on the chromium. The daughter is too young to have felt the full impact of life in a Venetian coffee house. She is bright, pretty and obliging. But I must go.







## Gondola Strike

THE black swans have disappeared! For the past week there has been a strike of gondoliers. The canals are forlorn, people no longer cross by ferry, and any boatmen who try to carry passengers are threatened with a ducking. Late-night revellers find that they have to make long detours to cross the bridges of the Grand Canal. Tourists are deprived of romance, and there are no longer the nightly processions of gondolas from the smart hotels. The motor-boats have had the waterfront to themselves and the *vaporetti* have been more than usually crowded. We have been deprived of a familiar sight and there has been that curious pregnant stillness that only occurs when men cease work in anger. A rash of posters has appeared and leaflets have been distributed. . . . The argument is this: the gondoliers are being put out of business by the motor-boats. It is a feud of long standing. If the motor-boats gain ascendancy Venice will be deprived of a splendid tradition. The canals will be full of fumes. Venice will no longer be the most beautiful city in the world. Venice will be ruined. . . . Etcetera, etcetera. It is an argument which is half true and half emotional, a cry from the past; it is chiefly the familiar argument against so-called "progress"—of the old world struggling for survival against new inventions.

Now, I am never very expert at diplomacy and I am cursed, if curse it is, with the ability to see both sides of the question, and thus I drift and lose myself in side issues. (Usually, tormented by blast and counterblast, both of which seem reasonable, I find that I run away and hide myself in art, because it is so much easier to control a work of art, a fixed and positive act of creation, than to waste time in storms of indecision.) But in this matter of the gondolas, as I sit in the clear, warm air of Venice, my mind has, for once, made an immediate decision, half rational, half emotional, like the wording of the posters. I am all for retaining the gondolas, and furthermore, would even go so far as to advocate the banning of certain kinds of motor traffic on the canals. . . . It is quite clear what would happen if the motor-boats won: Italians, being as they are, would turn the

Grand Canal into a race track for speedboats. The side canals would be dangerously congested, the noise would be deafening, people would fight and most certainly get drowned in collisions. The pace of life would become hysterical and the calm of Venice would be destroyed in the interests of speed. The lanes and alleyways would stink of petrol. The authorities would most certainly start tearing parts of Venice down to "open up" the city to accommodate motor traffic, as they have had to do with other old cities. And last but not least, there would be a terrible outburst of modern Italian motor-boat design. . . .

For Venice of all cities upon earth is not built for motor traffic. It is a survival of an old type of city, hardly altered since the eighteenth century. Its old function, its old glory have departed, but it has risen again to comparative prosperity as a tourist centre. People come here to see a unique city of astonishing beauty, hardly touched by any of the major military or æsthetic disasters of our century. They come, quite frankly, to escape from the familiar scenes of our time, for romantic reasons or to study a type of city where the arts of painting, sculpture and architecture are still intact. Shabby though the old city is, it has nevertheless come to us complete, not as a desolate ruin but as a living thing, and with it has survived a method of getting about the waterways which has not only been developed over hundreds of years, by men with as much sense of fitness as we have, but also with a sense of elegance perfectly in harmony with its surroundings. As a means of getting about such a peculiar city, travel by gondola is still as practical as ever it was—it is not a useless survival which has been superseded by something better. It is still the *best* method of navigating the narrow canals. Furthermore, it is extremely graceful and gives the tourists a great deal of pleasure, both as a treat to the eye and as a way of getting about.

To our modern way of thinking, however, gondola travel is slow, and to many people it seems expensive. These are the two main arguments against. . . . That it is slow is true, but people should not come here to rush about. The leisurely glide should be kept as part of the cure of Venice: we rush about too much anyway, and a lot of our rushing is pointless. It is a good thing to take life at a slower pace, even if occasionally one misses one's train home. . . . Speed is not a civilizing influence (at least in Venice, however much it may be in the stratosphere): it is corrosive, things happen too quickly. One of the greatest lessons that Venice has for us in the



twentieth century is that speed is not important to the enjoyment of life. I have heard people say in Venice, time and again, how much energy they had left to do other things when they didn't have to keep rushing about, for on the contrary, the habit of speed appears to shrink our lives rather than expand them. We seem to be less able to spend enough time with ourselves. . . . That the gondolas are expensive is a potent argument, yet they are not on the whole any more expensive than taxi fares in most of our capitals and cities. It would be true, however, to say that they would be used far more by visitors if the fares were cheaper, but that the gondoliers would have much less time for sleeping during the day. . . . Thus, though it is most unlikely that we should ever want to revive horse cabs in London, and that only the most eccentric of Englishmen would wish to travel again in a sedan chair, nevertheless, for the sake of Venice, let the gondolas be retained. Let us agree to go slowly for the joy of it and for the sake of keeping Venice whole. As for the expense of gondola rides, the tourists would hardly notice another small tax; as it is, we keep Venice by the hundred and one little extras we pay at the end of our hotel bills: let the gondoliers be subsidized by the tourists for the sake of their holiday enjoyment. Cheaper means of travel are already available in the *vaporetti* and the smaller municipal motor-boats: these services might be reasonably extended, without driving the gondolas off the water or spoiling the city.

There is one place, however, where I think the petrol engine would be a blessing, and that is on the large transport barges—which are still pushed with tremendous labour by manpower—carrying coal, timber, cement and all manner of heavy goods. Though it is a fine sight to see almost naked bronzed figures, muscles glistening in the sun, working these heavy loads along the main canals, it would obviously be much better if they were motor-driven, as they sometimes are. . . . But let us keep the gondola and the gondoliers, and preserve something of beauty and of extraordinarily fine watermanship. Venice would be a sad place without them.





## *Festa del Redentore*

AS though to anticipate later events, about six o'clock on the night of the fourteenth of July—the first night of the Festival—there was a huge double rainbow behind San Giorgio Maggiore. Boat-loads of people were being emptied on to the Riva degli Schiavoni, and the threat of rain caused some excitement among the café proprietors, who kept running in and out with their canvas chairs lest the seats should get wet, and taking down their awnings. The Piazzetta and Piazza were already milling with people gaily dressed. . . . (What an extraordinary sight this is when viewed from my balcony! How right Tiepolo's colour was! Against the white and grey buildings the scene is of a powdery brilliance: the white shirts of the men, the brilliant colours of the women's dresses—much vermilion and greeny-blue this year—and all those middle tones so beloved in Italy: pale khaki, pale chocolate, powder blue, pale olive green, slate grey, ochre and cinnamon, in contrast to the heads of black hair and the sunburnt faces.)

After an excellent dinner, where we are always bullied by the waiter, who thinks it is barbaric to have steak well done—"shrivelled" he calls it, with a shudder—we followed the crowd across the Piazza to the Campo San Zobenigo, where, from the gondola station, the first of the temporary bridges was built across the Grand Canal, then along the Zattere to the great Bridge of Boats across to the Church of the Redentore on the Giudecca. We had expected too much, of course, after seeing so many old prints of the Bridge of Boats, and were somewhat surprised to find an army pontoon bridge manned by soldiers at intervals, instead of—how foolish we are and incurably romantic about Venice!—a bridge built on barges which should have been baroque. The crowds were pouring over, up and down the small rises of the bridge, a constantly moving stream of bright colour. The Church of the Redentore, so elegant among the low line of meaner buildings, was tonight illuminated in strident colours, which completely transformed its appearance and destroyed all the architectural properties

of solids and spaces so painstakingly worked out by Palladio, imparting to it instead the quality of a large toy at a Christmas fair: the façade a most violent orange, the dome and towers the most emerald of greens and the windows and the interior of the cupola the most raspberry of reds. It looked, indeed, against the deepening blue of the night—the glow of the sunset still lingered on—as though it were made of sheets of coloured glass instead of marble, repellent and gay, but still a fitting background to the scene. The wide flight of steps leading up to the church slowly filled with the people coming off the bridge and formed a grandstand from which to view the spectacle on the Canal. Wandering among the people were the balloon sellers with their huge clusters of highly decorated globes glistening and swaying in the electric lights, and the caramel sellers, the fruit sellers and the sellers of celluloid wind-mills and the little dolls with staring eyes and fluffy skirts. At the top of the steps, on either side of the main entrance to the church, were the music-makers—on the left a brass band, on the right a choir—both making music at once, music of a totally different kind, creating utmost pandemonium.

The interior of the Redentore presented a more dignified scene and one of great gaiety, as though a ball and not a religious service were in progress, such a scene as there might have been in Bath in the eighteenth century. The aisles were tastefully decorated, the altars bright with candles and flowers and pots of aspidistras arranged upon the pediments, while at the crossing, under the spacious and extremely beautiful dome, were hung huge drapes of Indian red velvet trimmed with gold ribbons, from the arches down to the pavement. . . . And yet, with all the added gaiety, the sweet reasonableness of Palladio could not be destroyed, and the church was unusually neat. For this, the one great festival of the year, when the memory of the Redemption of Jesus steals all the crowds away from Venice at the height of the season, Palladio relaxes a little and the humbler decorations mix well with his elegant classicism. On this occasion, with the clergy massed in the sanctuary, the spirit of the Baroque comes to life again for a few hours, aided by lights, noise, glitter, clouds of incense, swags of drapery, urns of flowers and the stately and orderly movement of the service, the sparkling vestments and the swinging of censers. It would not have been in the least surprising to see a flying ballet of angels in the dome . . . or an occasional feather come twirling down through the clouds of smoke.



Already there are two large gilded cherubs in mid-air, hanging on wires: tonight they are happily appropriate. . . . What a fine sight the ranks of Capuchin monks were in their festal robes with their great untrimmed beards cascading down the embroidery, and how handsome looked the very old ones, bowed and white, with beards down to their waists.

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FROM the ordered and solemn singing in the church, out again to the cacophany of brass band and choir at the top of the steps, where a dense crowd had gathered. Still more people were coming over the bridge, and from the top of the steps they looked like an enormous procession walking in a perfectly straight line, miraculously on the surface of the waves. The night had become dark and clear, starlit; round the Redentore was a pool of orange light, while the quaysides of the Giudecca were hung with strings of lemon yellow lanterns. Not far away, to the left, a small fairground was in full swing, swarming with mothers and children, the roundabouts and various games of chance intermixed with fruit stalls, banked high, and stalls of shining chromium selling red and green drinks and coconut milk. The cafés of the Giudecca were doing a roaring trade, and all the shops were trimmed up for the night with coloured paper and fairy lights. The wide canal was gradually filling with boats, moving along the dark water like fireflies: trimmed with arches of leaves, plume-like clusters of ferns, and festoons of laurels, with paper lanterns among them. Tonight every craft in Venice had been brought into use and half the population was on the water: the entire canal was alive with boats against the faint background of the Palazzo Ducale and the Campanile. Moving slowly up and down among the smaller boats were the large decorated barges, looking as though sections of one of our Victorian piers had broken loose and were drifting away, with pavilions and bandstands hung with beads of coloured lights. (A while ago I bought a little gondola entirely constructed of coloured beads, with decorated hood and prow trimmed with bead flowers—tonight, except that each bead was a light, it had come true: the spirit was the same.) On the largest barges were complete orchestras, strings or brass, each giving a concert by lantern light to its own group of gondolas and small barks lying low upon the water around them. On others were choirs singing lustily but tunefully among the bowers of evergreens

and fairylights, and in the lesser boats private parties were singing their own individual songs to the accompaniment of accordion and guitar. Some barges had tables down the whole of their length, tables trimmed with vases of flowers and full of good things to eat and drink, under arches of laurel. The whole of the Guidecca Canal was full of floating concerts and dining-rooms. . . .

About nine o'clock the bridge was closed and the last of the people crowded on to the quayside. Soon the chains of lanterns along the Giudecca and the floodlighting of the Redentore went out, and across the water the cerise flares burning at intervals along the Zattere (revealing theatrical beauties in Santa Maria Rosario that are hidden in the daytime) slowly burned themselves out, until the whole scene was in darkness. From the far end of the Giudecca Canal, among the docks and shipping, the first of the fireworks shot into the sky, and so began a programme that continued until after midnight, a competition between five firms of fireworks makers to see who could achieve the noisiest and most surprising display. . . . At first, each display is heralded by a loud explosion, and begins slowly with a display of rocket firing—immense showers of variegated designs—and then, after a while, as the enthusiasm increases, the crackling and whistling gives way to greater explosions, until, working up for the finale, the noise is like a bombardment, with tremendous billowing clouds of smoke, out of the hot belly of which shoot fountains of lights, comets, snakes and star clusters, while drops of light and fireballs fall slowly into the sea over an immense area. The finale of each display reaches an unbelievable intensity—a spasm of fireworks, and then, just as it seems quite impossible for it to become more elaborate or noisy, it does so, as though some excitable creature had flung a torch into the pile of boxes and ignited the whole at once. The heavens shriek and splutter with frenzy, and then, in sheer exhaustion, it ends with a final big bang. . . . Firework displays on such a magnificent scale can only be likened to actual bombardments, differing only in the respect that they are more decorative and harmless: they represent the military exercises of religious festivals. . . . On the other hand, by creating imitations of Vesuvius, Etna and Stromboli they perpetuate the volcanic origins of Italian emotions: they are the angry side of Italian art, an anger magnificent and abandoned, as though the whole fabric of civilization were thrown into the air in one final, despairing and wonderful gesture. . . .

What a fine scene there was as the great red clouds drifted away over Venice, as the lights from the fireworks reflected in the sea below and revealed the hundreds of decorated barges and gondolas, black against the light! The silhouettes of people on the quaysides, the masts and rigging of the nearby shipping, the strings of shore lanterns now hanging like jet beads, the dark shapes of the balloon sellers with their bunches of semi-transparent, flower-decorated globes and the sellers of windmills with their wares tied like acacia fronds at the tops of poles combined to form a splendid scene against the red sky.

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WE went back to San Marco by gondola, for the bridge was closed and thousands of people were stranded upon the Giudecca until the end of the displays. Down on the water level the aspect changed, for we were low down among the towering gondoliers and among the decorated barges with their singing occupants. The great steel blades of the gondolas loomed dangerously out of the night and passed quickly by. . . . The Church of the Redentore, again floodlit, with the crescent moon above, looked immensely tall from the water level. We could also see under the long bridge, along the shining water, the endless perspective of dark boats against the illuminations. How rich the black boughs of leaves and the black figures looked against the sky, and the groups of faces lit by lantern light. . . . As we glided past the back of the Salute our gondolier had trouble with the candle in the lantern on the prow, but his partner at the stern kept the boat moving, threading his way skilfully through the drifting boats. The entrance to the Grand Canal was deserted as we rounded the Dogana, but the quayside was thronged with people, dark against the pale pink and white of the Palazzo Ducale and the pale blue domes and dim gold of St. Mark's.

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LOOKING back again across the water to the Giudecca, the people disembarking on the Molo made a fine sight. . . . A baroque water scene, lit by the reflected light from the Piazzetta, in subdued night colours, mostly whity-greens, greys, dark reds and umbers against the black water: strangely pale after the orange and red glow we had lived in on the other side. Dim figures sitting in boats, sailors standing by their oars or lying down on their cushions, all singing, quietly, to guitars.

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VENICE that night was full of fumes. It was two o'clock before I was able to drag myself wearily away, to rest, as I thought. But my room overlooking the Basilica, so admirable as a Royal Box from which to look down on the antics of the crowds, was no place in which to sleep. Naïvely, as an Englishman, I had hoped—against my better judgment—that it might have been possible to doze occasionally throughout the night, in spite of the advance information that the Festa del Redentore was described in most books as a "Venetian Bacchanal." By this time the crowds were pouring back over the Bridge of Boats, and soon the whole precincts of St. Mark's were full of excited people, stimulated to an unusual degree by the fireworks and no doubt by wine as well, so that throughout the night there was singing and dancing and endless tomfoolery, enlivened by strolling musicians. The only sensible thing to do was to join in as best I might. . . .

At the rosy dawn—all fumes blown away over Istria—the revellers were washing their faces at the fountain in the Piazzetta dei Leoncini, arranging their hair in little mirrors, ready to start another day and thronging the marble seats between the columns of the Basilica. Young priests were counting their flocks—peasants dressed entirely in black with black bundles—who had come in from the outlying towns and villages. Men were still singing in groups: folk songs, doggerel songs, accompanied with rhythmic clapping, and whole sections from opera, especially those which gave opportunities for solo tenor parts. (There was never a hint of jazz, for they were Italians all: no other nationalities could stand the pace and all tourists had retired long ago in utter exhaustion.) In the cafés, which had been open for two days, there was utmost confusion, and the waiters were dashing about on the verge of hysteria. Everybody was shouting as loudly as possible at everybody else, and the early bells were clanging from the Campanile, the Basilica and the Tower of the Giants. . . .

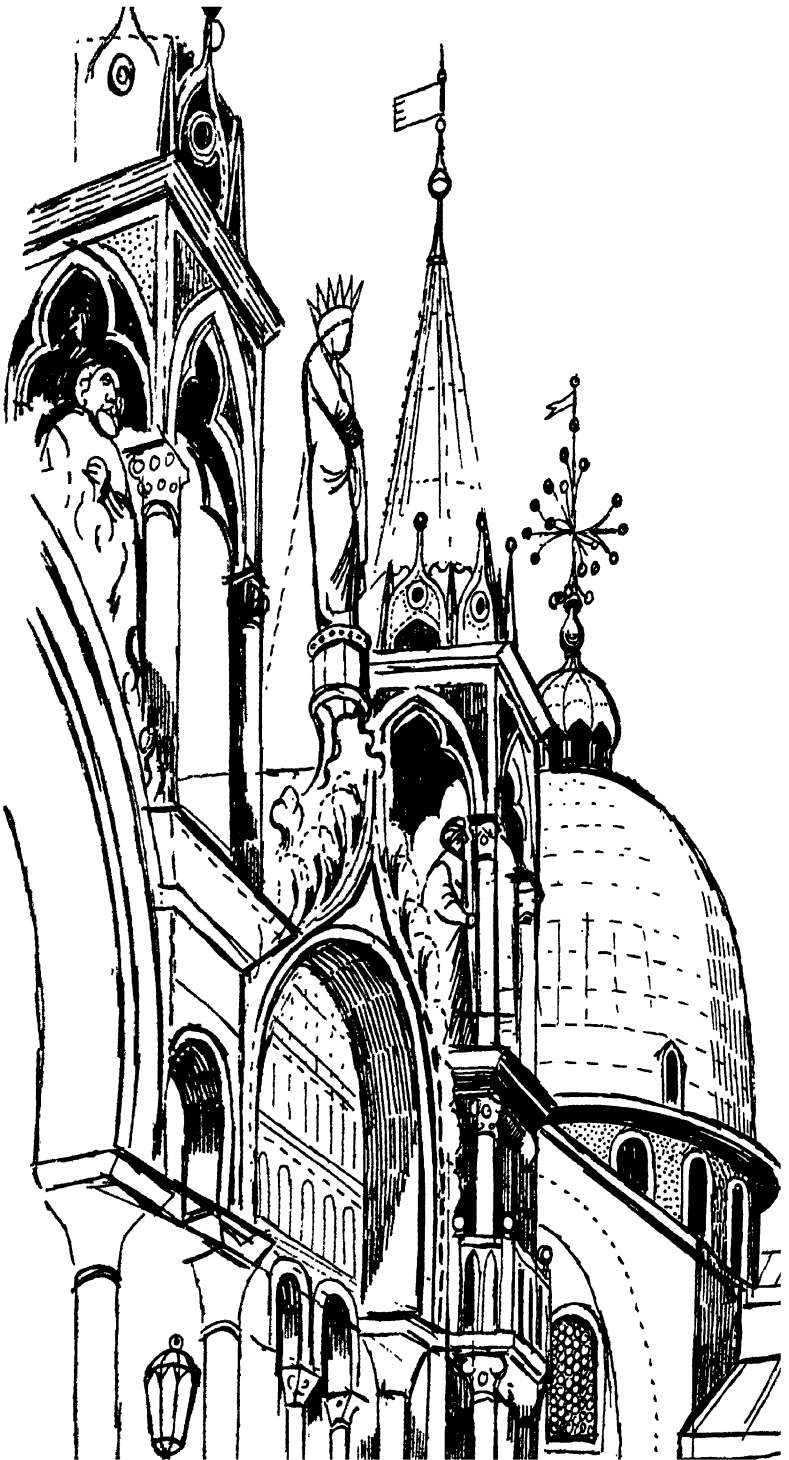
Then, at seven o'clock, the two Italians in the next room to me, a nephew and an uncle, came home after a night in the streets. Immediately on entering they played selections from "La Traviata" on their gramophone, as though the tempest of noise in the streets had not been enough for them. . . . The outcome was that for some thirty hours I didn't have a wink of sleep but spent my time marvelling at the vitality of these people, who poured out energy, hour after hour, without any signs of flagging, while I was almost weeping with fatigue.

## PART TWO



## *Time*

THE clocks of Venice are not synchronized. The hour shivers with indecision, unwilling to make a definite statement. It is noon four times in the Piazza San Marco: every hour, in fact, is multiple. First rings the small bell at the corner of the Basilica. A hammer beats under a canopy. Then, a few minutes afterwards the first Giant swings round and strikes. Three minutes later the second Giant swings round and strikes. Finally, with small beginnings, the bells of the Campanile begin their musical thunder. But the hour is never fixed—there is always doubt: the mirage of Venice shivers. We are never sure which hour we are in, and, while dreaming in the summer heat, as the mirage settles, the mind sees other scenes—drifts backwards and forwards through history, aided by visions left to us by painters, sculptors and architects. . . . It is the same hour, striking in different periods at once.





## *The Basilica of St. Mark*

THE Basilica of St. Mark is a very complicated building. Its personality is so intricate and elusive that it is almost impossible to get a clear idea of it. There must be men who have lived with St. Mark's since they were boys, to whom its secrets have revealed themselves one by one as they grew older, and for whom every piece of marble has some tale to tell. But there must be few of these, even among Venetians, though there are many who are familiar with some particular aspect. The scholars, quite sensibly, subdivide its charms, much as they do when they dissect a butterfly and put its parts under a microscope. They give us much valuable information, for which we can only be grateful, and sometimes a lot of wrong ideas, which only cast shadows in the mind. They tell us about the domes and crockets, or the system of rainwater drainage. They tell us of feats of construction, of the stresses and strains of the building, some even give us precise measurements down to the last centimetre or down to the last half-inch. They analyse the different stones with which the building is lined, they extract romantic meanings from them, and one of them drew moral conclusions. They tell of its treasures and conjure up as best they may the the historic background of each jewel and plate of gold. Most of all, they talk of the mosaics, which are among the greatest remaining monuments of Byzantine art in the world. But still we remain baffled. The two permanent things about St. Mark's are its continuity and the fact above all others that it is a church. The first is an abstract quality which cannot be described, and the second is one that we are apt to forget when we get lost in the details, though these two things bind everything else together. Perhaps the only possible way to look at St. Mark's is with the eye of innocence for, unlike later buildings in Italy which were often governed by more rational architectural laws, St. Mark's seems to have been largely an affair of the emotions. Face to face with the reality, visitors from Northern Europe are confounded, for here is a building that has no connection with anything seen before. Of all the

churches in the world this building connects us with Byzantium, and thus with the oriental beginnings of Christianity. Tradition says that St. Mark's is a copy of the church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople, a church now vanished, and in the early centuries every shipload from the East carried some treasure or some stone to Venice to embellish it. Thus, though in plan and general construction it followed the traditions of Byzantine architecture, its decorations, especially as the centuries wore on, became a matter of devotional offerings. The church is hung with thousands of gifts, and what we see today can no longer strictly come under the heading of pure architecture, for it is a building wrought more with emotion than with intellect. It is thus a special case, for nowhere else is there a building like it. Unique and eccentric, we cannot judge it at this distance of time by any of the canons of taste and habits of mind that have matured since it was built. We cannot think of it in terms of Gothic, Palladian or Baroque, or now, after many centuries of modifications, even as Byzantine. It is, nevertheless, the most exciting building imaginable, and the exterior has achieved a most unusual and pleasing fantasy. It is perhaps the most joyful exterior I know, joyful and serious at the same time. But we must look upon it without strain, without cultural impedimenta, without being expert. It is a baffling building of eccentric beauty, and no other building so well expresses the mysterious charm of Venice.

The overwhelming impression of the exterior is that it is an oriental building, an impression mainly gathered from the fine cluster of domes surmounted by their multiple crosses of golden balls. Its series of strong archways set the style for the later developments of Veneto-Byzantine domestic architecture, to be seen at its best in the frontages of the Palazzi Loredan and Farsetti, and the Fondaco dei Turchi, and in a later phase in the front of the Palazzo Dario, with its delightful roundels of inlaid precious marbles. When the Gothic style came over the water to Venice it found a sympathetic foundation in St. Mark's, and the flamboyant crockets above the ogival arches on the front are in perfect harmony with the Byzantine substructure. The Venetian Gothic style became indeed a curious refinement of the heavier Byzantine style, and St. Mark's once more spread its influence throughout Venice, from the stately beauty of the Palazzo Ducale to its most sophisticated expression in the Ca' d'Oro. St. Mark's was thus a link with the East, and a prototype of the later developments of architecture in Venice, as

well as with the beginnings of Renaissance architecture in Italy. It is interesting to remember that for four hundred years the domes of St. Mark's were the only domes in Europe. The next one was Brunelleschi's in Florence.

I cannot say that I am wholeheartedly in love with the interior, mainly because my mind has come to rest on architecture of a later period. It is a glorious amalgamation of Oriental and Western styles, and whereas the exterior is light and gay, the interior is curiously heavy and clumsy. But the link with the East is stronger than ever, for here if anywhere we catch the flavour of the Byzantine Empire. There is a mixture of Oriental and Egyptian splendour coupled with heavy Hebrew moralizing, with just a sufficient leavening of Greek humanism to keep it alive. The effect is rich and barbaric, and cuts us off completely from true Italian grace and classical reasonableness. It has a stronger connection with the Nile delta and Babylonia than with the purity of Greek thought or the clarity of the Roman mind. This heavy Eastern style went its own spicy way, covering itself more and more with ornaments, until it produced the moon-wonder of the Taj Mahal and finally the glistening confectionary of Ispahan.

Of all building material, marble is the richest. For purely sensuous effects it outstrips even gilding and painting. Painting and gilding produce a more emotional response, and were fully exploited during the Renaissance, but the use of marbles, as in the interior of St. Mark's, has a more fundamental appeal, more earthy, more connected with rocks and caves. One has the sensation of being in a huge cave cut out of rock, exquisitely finished with shining surfaces. Every single part, from the pavement to the mosaics on the cupolas and vaults, is faced with stones or else with coloured glass. Wood is not used at all and metal only in altar furniture. The different colours of the natural grainings of the stones are put together to form patterns, augmented by intricate carvings and inlays. Balustrades and finials, screens and panels, which we are accustomed to see in wood, are all made of marble, and thus they are heavier and thicker in quality. There is a fatness about them, and a glistening, almost waxy look which creates an extraordinary richness, a richness appreciated as much by the hand as by the eye. The size of the slabs of marble, too, increases this sense of bigness, for though they may be inlaid, or worked with mouldings or pierced into grills, they retain their massiveness.

The walls of the church are of split sheets of *cipollino* marble, forming grained patterns when opened up and placed side by side, an effect which I find rather repellent, though it has its devotees. There is a particularly fine pulpit made of slabs, drums and columns, with a dome swelling slightly outwards with an oriental fulsomeness that we immediately connect with turbans, gourds and fruits. The pulpit is in two tiers, a half-hexagon on heavy columns, with a quatrefoil above it, and then on that, supported on slender columns, the little fat dome. There is an elaborate system of stairways leading up into the pulpit, and the whole creates the effect of a mountain of marble from which to hear voices from on high and has a distinct connection with the tall Moslem pulpits with their long flights of stairs, and even with minarets.

The pavement of St. Mark's, built on piles, undulates beneath the feet and gives an odd sensation of dizziness. We walk about, as though on a rather orderly pebble beach, upon inlays of oblongs and hexagons, meanders, checks, diapers, triangles, borders and all the intricate means of arranging sawn and polished marble beloved of the Oriental turn of mind. The patterns of the pavement are not all abstract, and at certain places the hard geometry makes way for patterns of meandering vines, among which peacocks and peahens perch. There are formal trees with doves and geese in them, and lively designs with eagles, and at two places more elaborate panels—a picture of cocks strutting along bearing a trussed wolf on a pole, and, of all the unlikely beasts to find on the floor of a Christian church, a picture of a rhinoceros. By a somewhat inartistic substitution, the rhinoceros in the thirteenth century had taken the place of the unicorn. The latter wild beast, so elegant and suggestive, was said to be tamed by resting its head in the lap of a virgin, and it is odd to think of a rhinoceros doing the same, but the idea persisted, even though Marco Polo in 1298 said of the rhinoceros that "they are not of that description of animals which suffer themselves to be taken by maidens, as our people suppose, but are quite of a contrary nature." Whether or not the two cocks carrying the trussed wolf is a symbol of good triumphing over evil I cannot tell, but it is nevertheless a fine piece of artistic humour, the fulfilment of many a wish both ancient and modern. An almost identical panel is to be found in the pavement of San Donato at Murano. In spite of their obvious use as symbols, I like to think of the cocks, geese, hens and vines as being partly at least artistically capricious. Peacocks too, so

familiar as symbols of the Resurrection in Byzantine art, became as time went on a common sight in Venice, and were used to decorate many a secular picture. Byzantine art was hieratic, that is plain to see, but originally all these objects must have had their place in real life. The mosaics of latter-day Rome, with which artistic trends those of Byzantium were mixed, were less concerned with moralizing and being deadly serious, and used the self-same motifs in their pictures simply because they were the common objects of their own farmyards. They derived their greater subjects from the stories of the pagan deities—than whom it would be difficult to find a less virtuous crew—and though some of their smaller groups were used purely decoratively, many pointed some moral, derived from Æsop's Fables and similar stories. But I must not fall into the dangerous trap of attributing fanciful motives to the stones of Venice or I shall lose myself in detail and forget my main purpose. As it is, I am merely idling upon the pavement of St. Mark's in the heat of July. . . . Like all pavements, this one is better seen when we are above it than when we are on it, and its full magnificence is best appreciated from the galleries which run all round the church above the arcading of the nave and transepts.

What a treat these galleries are! Narrow lanes of marble with hefty balustrades, so smooth to the touch, so perilously worn by the tramp of centuries of visitors, held together with clamps of iron and lead to keep them from tumbling down into the cathedral. At all the junctions and turns they have smooth marble knobs like pounds of cheese. Here we can sit all morning in a corner in rich Byzantine gloom and look down upon winding trails of tourists, or watch the restorers at work on the mosaics above. Outside it may be as hot as a baker's oven, but up here, in these glittering vaults, the air is cool, though heavy with a thousand years of incense. Once on a level with the springing of the vaults, the atmosphere of St. Mark's changes, for whereas below there is a heavy feeling about the building, almost a sense of architectural tedium, the mosaics are stimulating and lively. They are strangely different from the architecture they adorn, as though there was a rift between what the architects thought good and what the artists thought good. This is perhaps understandable if we consider the extremely conservative traditions of Byzantine builders. They were rarely original, especially in famous buildings, when every part of a church was built according to fixed rules, and Byzantine architecture was

certainly very solidly entrenched by the time St. Mark's was built. Indeed, it has remained so ever since and has given orthodox churches a fixed character right up to the present day. The first mosaics of St. Mark's, however, some of which were added considerably later than the building, very early showed quirks of originality. In the main they followed the fixed traditions of Byzantine iconography, but the rendering of individual scenes is extraordinarily fresh and sometimes quite original, as for instance in the enormous mosaic of the Miraculous Recovery of the Body of St. Mark. On the whole, these mosaics of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries have a sparseness, a clarity of statement, almost a sense of proportion and certainly a mastery of placing which the architecture seems to lack. In short, in spite of the solemnity of the occasion, the artists working in St. Mark's were beginning to enter the true stream of Italian art, and in spite of their overall Byzantine flavour they strongly hint at the art of Giotto, who was decorating the Scrovegni Chapel so few miles away. The architects of St. Mark's looked backwards to Constantinople while the artists looked forward to the Renaissance.

I shall always remember the surprise I had when I first saw these mosaics some years ago. We had been brought up to believe that Byzantine work was as stiff in execution as it seemed to be in thought. Photographs and copies—especially copies, which the art schools of England inherited from Owen-Jones and a host of German professors—always made them appear dead and dull. But to come face to face with them in St. Mark's, literally within a few feet of them, was to receive a great and pleasant surprise. No execution could be more vigorous, no rendering of ideas more uncompromising or direct. The very crudity of mosaic, when the stones were half an inch square, and the technical subtleties so few—no underpaintings, glazes or varnishes to worry about—coupled with the artists' fortunate simplicity of ideas and their equally fortunate ignorance of anatomy and perspective, conspired to produce an art of unusual vigour and power. Since those days artists have solved greater and more subtle problems, and have worked in more difficult mediums, but never in the whole history of Western art have they worked with such downrightness. The work of the Byzantine school of mosaicists is naïve only in the most superficial sense, but it is true to say that they worked with the same freedom as children. We have only to look at the other mosaics in the Basilica, done during the later

periods of Venetian art, and especially at those on the front, to realize the purity of the early ones.

The individual pictures one can enjoy as the fancy takes one, but as there are said to be forty-five thousand, seven hundred and ninety square feet of them one's fancy must roam for weeks. The main subjects illustrate stories from the Old and New Testaments, with stories from the lives of the saints. Quite a large group of them illustrate the Story of the Bringing of the Body of St. Mark to Venice and in a side chapel the subsidiary story of St. Isodore. Thus, in the days when few people could read, by tilting the head backwards the whole amazing incidents of the Bible could be seen on the glittering ceilings, while the story of St. Mark, incredible though it is, connected the Basilica with the miracles of old. The subject of the latter series laid the foundations of nearly six hundred years of paintings, for though Venetian history was singularly free of miracles it was particularly rich in worldly incidents which provided subjects for the greatest series of propaganda paintings ever made for any European state. Thus it is not easy, among such a fine array, to select one's favourites, for there is always something new to catch the eye, and what one misses on one visit comes as a pleasant surprise on the next. It all points to the fundamental fallacy of tourism, which is that these things were not made to be visited rapidly but were made to be lived with for a lifetime.

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AMONG many other things, I am a lover of flying figures, for the flying figure, with or without wings, is one of the most extraordinary sensations of art. For thousands of years it seems as though men have resented the fact that they could not fly. We have been endowed with more gifts than most creatures, but the gift of actually being able to leap into the air and come to rest with perfect safety upon the cornices, domes and spires of our buildings has been denied us. We have been beaten by birds, though not vanquished, for at last we can fly if only in machines. In the past the sensation of flying through the air has not been unknown to us but has taken place only in dreams, and thus in painting and sculpture—especially in painting—our dreams have vicariously come true. In centuries when the imagination was more valid than it is today the flying figure in art was as much a daily occurrence as the aeroplane is in our time, and was received as part of normal experience. Ceilings,

vaults and domes became the home of enchanting dream worlds where people took off with all the ease of birds. In Byzantine art people stood as much as they flew; in fact flying was reserved mostly for angels and kindred spirits, for at that time, even though all eyes were strained on the world to come where flying of some kind was a great feature, the majority of people were only too well aware of just how much their feet were planted on the earth. Only in later centuries, notably the Baroque and Rococo, did the whole population fly about in art, either as a symptom of elation at the satisfactory condition of their material lives or as an escape from the tedium of it. So in Byzantine art the angels, cherubim and seraphim, flew, as is their nature, while the others mainly stood about in groups. The great characteristic of the Byzantine flying figure is its true birdlike quality. The figures are not merely human beings with wings; they are curiously superhuman, androgynous, indeterminate and magical. (And thus they fit in with the Byzantine conception of the state where we are told that above the level of kings and queens, and even above the level of the priests, there existed a further class of state officials called angels, who with their high piping voices and birdlike behaviour sang in the choirs and performed on earth tasks which in heaven were reserved for real ones. But this is not the proper place in which to pursue this fascinating subject, nor to follow its developments down into the harems of the East or to the last remaining choir of men with boys' voices in Rome at the end of last century. It would need to be treated with great insight and delicacy. . . .)

The most vivid angels in the mosaics of St. Mark's are the four which are flying round the Cupola of the Ascension, supporting the starry nimbus where Christ sits in glory upon a double rainbow; while the other great angels are the four magnificent Archangels in the soffits of the Cupola of the Pentacost. Of lesser angels there are many, but none so powerful as these. The most populous group of angels and the most bird-like are in the Baptistry in the Cupola of the Apocalypse, mosaics perhaps of less merit but equally vigorous and startling. I use this last word in its literal sense, for unlike the angels of later work which are usually comforting creatures, Byzantine angels take one by surprise and compel one to live in a remote world of oriental magic, far, far removed from our own stolid century. The Cupola of the Ascension, which occurs in the very centre of the building, is the most stately and ceremonious of all the



mosaics of St. Mark's, and it must rank as one of the greatest of ceiling decorations.

The scenes from the life of Christ on the western arches of the central cupola are my favourite mosaics, especially the Crucifixion, the Kiss of Judas and Christ before Pilate. The picture of the Descent into Hell strongly follows the design of the same scene at Torcello but with more movement, while the Resurrection is impressive because it relies solely on the towering single figure in the rocky landscape, placed next to the crowded scene of the Incredulity of Thomas. Of quite another character are the scenes of the lives of Philip, Giacomo, Bartholomew and Matthew, mosaics of sparse understatement, having about them the simplicity of Greek pottery painting. The scenes from the Life of Mary in the north transept are punctuated with very curious pieces of architecture, acting as a foil to the slow procession of drifting and leaning figures. Figures of terror are Saint Hilarion and Paul the Hermit, severe, dreadful and ascetic, but the single figures of St. Leonard, St. Clement and others are weakly conventional.

The most populous and animated of all the mosaics are in the atrium, where in sequence after sequence the stories of the Old Testament are told with all the vigour imaginable. It might be wrong to suggest an atmosphere of gaiety, but gay these pictures are when compared with Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel decorations or Tintoretto's paintings in the Scuola di San Rocco; nor do they suggest any of the sombre qualities of medieval Gothic painting, through which runs a streak of fatalism and cruelty and the hardness of northern life. We do not have to go very far back to detect in these the essential happiness of pagan art, for under a thin veil of Christian seriousness we can easily see the motifs of Greek and Roman painting coupled with the spiciness of Byzantium and Alexandria. The mosaics in the Cupola of the Creation, the Life of Adam and Eve, the truly amazing series of the Building of the Ark and the Flood, and such scenes as "Increase and Multiply" and the Sacrifice of Cain and Abel use all the attitudes and properties so familiar in Greek and Roman painting—the vine pergolas, the sacrificial altars, the cornucopias, the curtained recesses, the olive trees, the mounds of rocks, the little pieces of architecture, while the animals and birds, so astonishingly drawn, leaping and flying among the flowers and orange groves, sum up all the virility of the previous thousand years. The figures, too, in their attitudes and actions, have appeared before—though

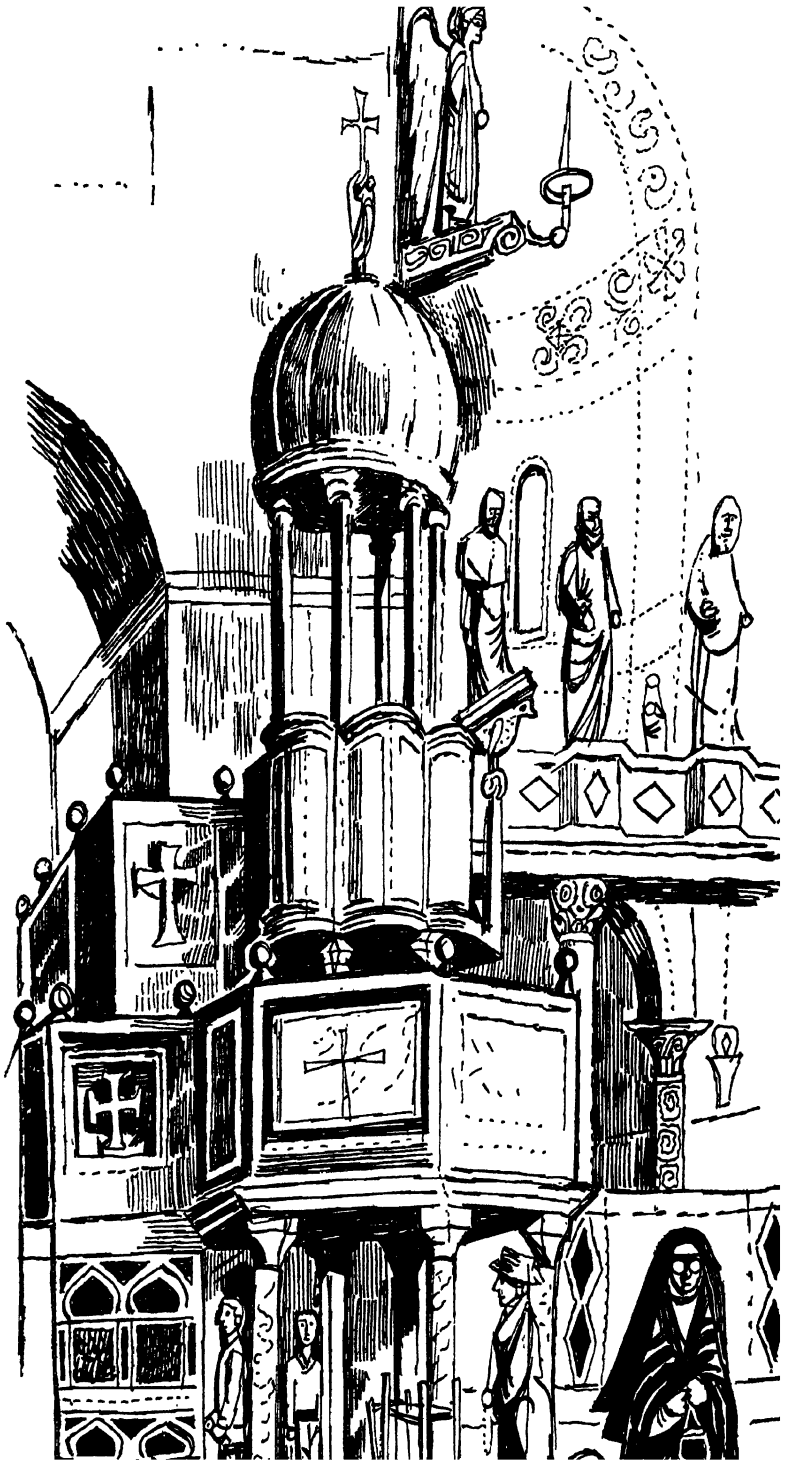
nudity is at a minimum and now they are dressed in longer clothes and they smile less. However, they clearly show that Pan was dead and that the brilliant interlude of nature gods was over for a while. The art of these mosaics is truly Christian: they were the summing up of the rough art of the Catacombs and the bringing together, into a new age, of the streams of Judaism, the remnants of Greek thought and the newly established dogmas of the Eastern Empire.

The other great quality of the mosaics of St. Mark's is that they are illustrations, for, apart from the spoken word, pictures were the only other means of passing on ideas to the masses. Printing was not yet invented. Thus they present, with the minimum of fuss and with no unnecessary images, the pith of the stories they tell. They are true illustrations, and the imagery they use illustrates ideas rather than actual scenes. Their intention is almost purely literary and they precede books, and their pictorial content is in a sense incidental, though slowly it was to lead throughout the fourteenth century to the development of the tradition of pure painting, when literature went one way and painting lived a life of its own. There are two further groups of mosaics in St. Mark's which represent the beginnings of this process and which act as a link between Byzantine Venice and the later Venice—the first in the Chapel of St. Isodore, the second, which tells the story of St. Mark, in the lunette above the Portal of St. Alipio on the front of the cathedral, in the great mosaic on the wall in the western transept and in the incidents under the arches on either side of the choir. Both groups are concerned with the legends of the two saints and the bringing of their relics to rest in the Basilica, and thus, though the majority of the mosaics deal with subjects of the Old and New Testaments, these link up the greater fact of Christianity with the beginnings of the glorification of Venice.

The mosaics in the Chapel of Saint Isodore deserve a stronger mention than they usually get, for though they are not as fine artistically as the great mosaics in the main part of the Basilica, they are remarkably vivid, very strong and form a unit of decoration. In rich colours—dark reds, blues, greens, black and white on a gold ground—they tell of the life, trial, torture, martyrdom and the ultimate bringing of the body of St. Isodore to rest in this chapel. But apart from their artistic merits, they indicate the dominant religious mood of the time in which they were done, a mood which, however important it may have been historically,

I find rather gloomy, but which it is necessary to know if we are to understand Venice. The mood, quite simply, is of men enduring the miseries of life and of their rather violent methods of entering into the escape of religious experience. The figures and objects appear like actors and stage properties against a golden backcloth: they have all the simplicity of a miracle play. What we see are not particular groups of rocks but rockiness, not particular men, women and soldiers but the essence of human beings playing those rôles. There is no attempt at portraiture, and there is almost no difference in facial expressions, neither smiles, nor pain, nor ecstasy. Unhampered by portraiture and personality, they achieve a calm anonymity which is timeless and hypnotic, and in spite of costume their message is as vivid today as it was when the mosaics were laid. Even the face of St. Isodore, undergoing his frightful experiences, has the same blank expression as his tormentors. All seem to share equally the same pathological experience, the murderers and the murdered, for the sake of the faith they hold. The extraordinary thing is that there is no hint of atrocity. The pictures make it all seem alarmingly normal. Precept has robbed the scenes of horror and the argument is established in spite of the unsavoury way of demonstrating it. Soldiers peep from behind their shields, a man brings faggots to stoke the fire, while St. Isodore burns with dumb suffering in the leaping flames. He is then dragged, naked and bleeding, across rocks by a man in black mounted on a red horse, and finally he is beheaded. It is the glimpse into the religious mentality of the time which is shocking: there is a kind of helplessness in this cruelty; the torturers appear to have lost their way in life and seem unable to get back to normality. Amidst these stupid, blank faces the only positive one is that of the demon, a brown hairy monster with claws and wings, as though evil were the only sharp thing in life, and goodness the quality discovered too late after the saint had been murdered. Over all these scenes hangs a heavy, peasant-like crudity—their religion seems earthbound, as if they only glimpse salvation through violent actions and physical cruelty. . . . The series ends with pictures of the body of St. Isodore being welcomed to Venice by the Doge and its subsequent interment in this chapel. Behind his marble screen, a few feet away, St. Isodore lies, so that all may enter vicariously into his martyrdom.

Today we have a tendency to look upon works of art in too dispassionate a way: we tend to overlook their subjects and get an

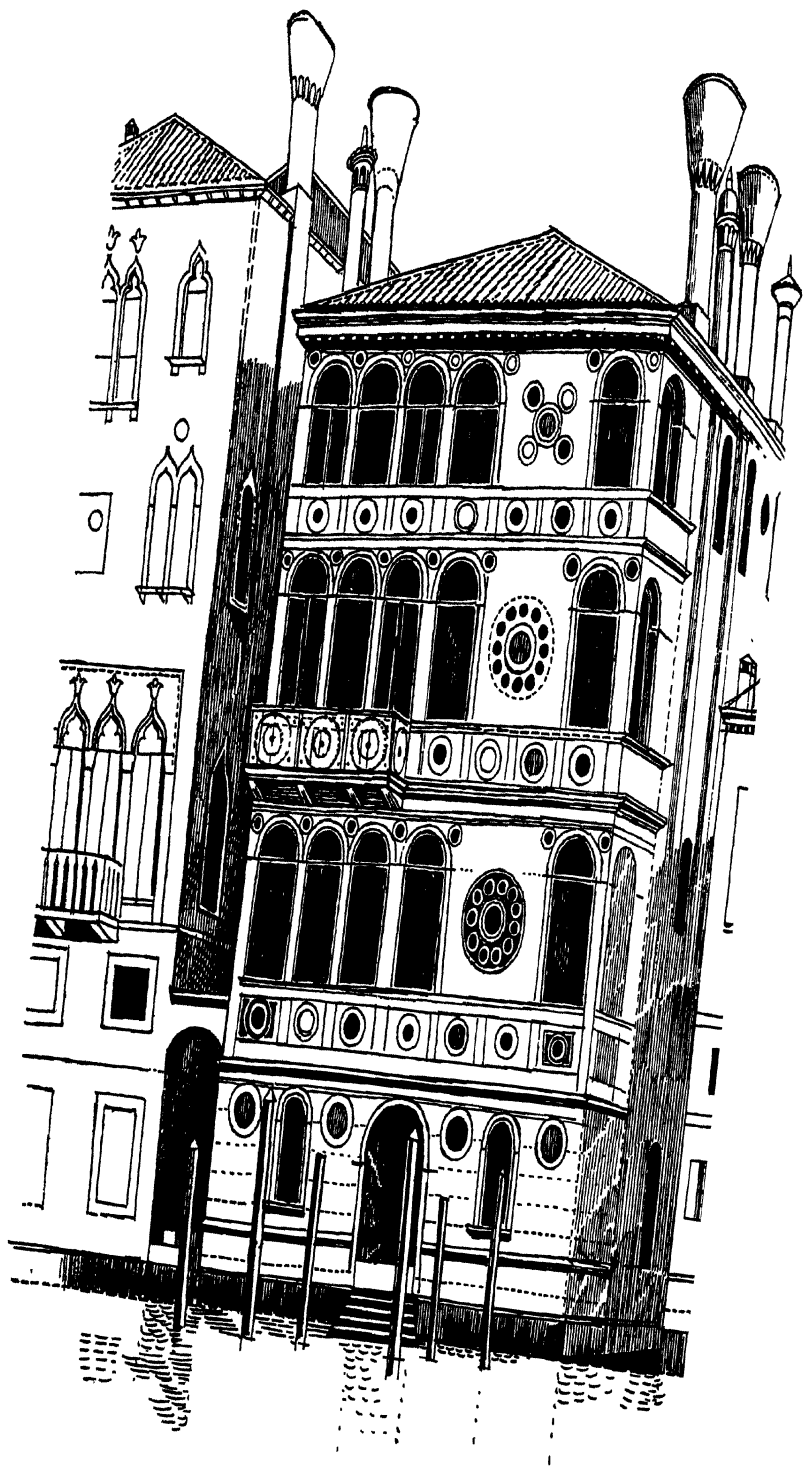


elevated enjoyment out of the way they were done. This is perhaps as it should be, as by far the greater proportion of subjects seems depressing and there is little to be got from dwelling too long on them. But I find these early centuries gloomy—they are altogether too heavy a place for me. Before I leave these splendid perfumed dreams of St. Mark's behind, and escape into the bright sunshine of the Piazza—and incidentally into those brighter, more interesting centuries of the Renaissance and the delightful frivolities of later Venice—this is the place to recount the Legend of St. Mark, for it is a theme which runs throughout Venetian art from beginning to end. Tradition says that when St. Mark was sailing up the Adriatic a violent storm washed his boat upon one of the Venetian islands or, to be more precise, upon the island where now stands the church of S. Francesco della Vigna, and that there an angel appeared to him saying: *Pax tibi, Marce, hic requiescet corpus tuum*. This phrase of comfort was interpreted by the inhabitants as meaning that it was ordained that the body of St. Mark should one day rest among the lagoons. However, St. Mark died in A.D. 57 and lay for many years in Alexandria, and thus if the Venetians were to have the body at all they would have to steal it. In the year 828 two daring merchants, no doubt roaming the seas as respectable pirates, as they did at that time, one named Messere Rustico di Torcello, the other Messere Bono di Malamocco, decided to slip into Alexandria in spite of the ban on trading with the Infidel. There they gained the confidence of the guardians of the temple where the body was preserved. It is said that at the dead of night they were led to the place of interment by a "sweet odour." They wrapped the body carefully and placed it in a large basket, and then to put the Mohammedans off the scent they concealed it, so the tale goes, with quarters of pork and cabbages. And thus, as merchandise, the body of St. Mark came to Venice. On arrival Doge Giustiniani forgave the merchants for their illegal visit to Alexandria, and with the nobles and clergy he welcomed the sacred body, and it lay for a space in the Palazzo Ducale. A chapel was built on the Broglio, which we now call the Piazza, and St. Theodore, who had been there before, was deposed, and a year later amidst great rejoicing St. Mark was reinterred and became the Patron Saint of Venice. The story, however, does not end there, for the chapel was burnt down during the revolt of August 976. Armed men streamed into the Piazza from all sides, the Doge and his infant son were massacred while taking sanctuary in St.

## THE LION AND THE PEACOCK

Mark's, and the chapel, the Palazzo Ducale and three hundred houses disappeared in flames. The body of St. Mark vanished in the commotion. A new church was built, the one which we now see, and by 1094 it was ready in all its glory, glittering with splendid mosaics and polished marble, but to everyone's sorrow, especially Doge Vitale Falier's, it was ready for consecration except for the body of St. Mark. So, as on many other solemn occasions, it was decided to pray for a miracle, as it was now realized that only a miracle could restore the lost treasure, and on the twenty-fifth of June a general fast was proclaimed, and a procession of nobles, their wives and children, headed by the Doge, joined in an intercession with the Patriarch and clergy for the recovery of the body. Much to everybody's amazement and joy one of the pillars of the nave began to tremble, and suddenly two of the stones opened like doors and revealed in a cavity the casket in which the body was laid. . . . These final scenes, of the intercession and the opening of the pillar, are the subjects of the great mosaic covering the wall space in the west transept. The Basilica is cut in half to show the interior, and it looks very much like the inside of a huge and glittering shell with its convolutions of domes and vaults. The first half shows the nave and sanctuary crowded with bowing and bended suppliants, and the second half shows them all standing upright gazing at the opened compartment in the pillar. The Doge is prominent among them, and the ladies and children are gorgeously robed, with cloaks edged with ermine and sewn with designs of pearls, with diadems of gold and jewels, and braided hair. Behind them stands a crowd in the doorway, among whom are men with turbans. On this occasion when all turned out in their most costly robes and jewellery, we can sense the atmosphere of the Basilica as it was on its opening day, which happened, quite by accident, to be a day of miracles and wonderment.







## Quattrocento

THE Early Renaissance found Venice a city of merchants busily keeping accounts. Even the Doge Mocenigo in 1423 had ample time upon his death-bed to make a detailed report to his senators—of the war loan, the public debts, the taxes, the profits from trade, the numbers of Venetian ships, seamen and shipwrights, and the values of the houses and the rents therefrom. . . . We find that the state had prospered during the time when Europe had been sleeping through the Dark Ages, and, that gloomy and troubled dream being over, the morning light discovered Venice to be very wide awake, thriving, businesslike and robust. Nor did she at this time, if we are to judge from records left to us, take a great deal of interest in the enthusiastic culture of the period. Her merchants were far too busy with the profit and loss to take much interest in poetry and literature, or to concern themselves with the broken statues of antiquity or the flights of Greek fancy, or even, at the beginning of the Renaissance, to be much interested in the exploits of Roman history. They preferred their own heroes to the heroes found in books, and were far too interested in the daily arrival of treasure ships to indulge in day-dreams. This intense practical turn of mind produced an efficient and enlightened state, and in spite of mercantile ambitions of individuals to better themselves at the expense of others, Venice had developed a system of state pensions, provided for widows and orphans, had medical and welfare schemes, all of which made a very sound basis for the glories of the Venetian Renaissance. It was one of the few states of Europe who have had the sense to put the horse before the cart: physical wants were first provided for and spiritual delights followed. They seem never to have fallen into the mire of superstition which has always been such a retarding influence in the affairs of men. Nor were they particularly interested in politics, for, as Sebellico remarked when he tried to interest the young Venetian nobles in political discussions: “When I ask them what people think, say and expect about this or that movement in Italy, they all answer with one

voice that they know nothing about the matter." We are presented with the picture of a group of noblemen, grave and cautious, soberly dressed, secure in their wealth and understanding of this world, who were first and foremost interested in the Venetian state as a thriving business concern, only casually interested in the affairs of the rest of Italy and who, though by no means impious, had learnt to keep the church in its place. Even their doges they elected as old as possible, so that the heads of the state should die quickly before they could become a nuisance.

Into this healthy and sensible atmosphere the spirit of the Renaissance came in all the first flush of its enthusiasm and beauty. . . .

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IT is easy to picture the contemporary Venetian craftsman viewing German Gothic type founts as being already old-fashioned though they had but recently come over the Alps. With speed and admirable common sense they proceeded to adapt the neat handwriting of their account books to the design of more practical and readable alphabets. The ideas of the Renaissance came over the lagoons to them from Florence and Rome, bringing the romantic dream of antiquity. It was perhaps no accident that that dream was interpreted by the Venetians Francesco Colonna and an unknown artist as a *Vision of Love*, in that most superb of all early illustrated printed books the *Dream of Poliphilus*, in which pageants and festivals played a great part in a series of beautiful though muddled allegories. In Venice, at an early stage of the Renaissance, the most vital motives were thus given visual form in books, and for many years such books were used as sources of ornaments and decorations. More important still, the type faces designed at that time, blending the excellences of the Italian chancery handwriting with a clear study of antique letter forms, have had a boundless influence on printing. (William Morris in his valiant attempt to clean up the horrid though fascinating mess of late nineteenth-century printing, returned to this period for his inspiration. . . .)

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THE invigorating curiosity of the time—which I can only view with the utmost envy—beginning as a literary dream, led to the study of ancient art and architecture, and was quickly transposed into the reality of new building and sculpture. An interest in the

glories of Ancient Rome, revived by poets and historians, ran exactly parallel to the contemporary ideas of worldly glory; and the pomps and pageants, by which the state expressed itself in public, took the form of a masquerade of Roman triumphs, still delightfully naïve, and filtered through the already well-developed traditions of Byzantine usage and the splendours of medieval heraldry. Even church buildings slowly took upon themselves the flavour of pagan temples, and the ornaments veered away from the heavy delights of St. Mark's and the never-quite-happy creations of Italian Gothic. The vine and *amorini*, satyrs and dolphins, swags of flowers, the urn, the shield and all the panoply of classical orders returned, seen through innocent eyes, rarefied by the dreams of youth, refreshed by the sleep of centuries. . . . The ornaments looked as though the artists were straying through the meadows and along the seashore for the first time. . . . When men were now able to withdraw their gaze from the benefits of the world to come, they looked upon the real world with new eyes, and saw that it contained not only fresh prospects for economic developments but also that it was astonishingly beautiful. Ideas of beauty, of elegance, of gracious living—and the joy of looking upon their own faces—spread like a passion. The confidence of youth, feeding upon the ideas of classical glory, developed a new art, and those few generations who had the good fortune to live at that time used their wealth and taste to foster what is, in my opinion, the best of Venetian art. We cannot but envy a period of peace and prosperity where the ideas and charms of youth were taken into old age.

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NOW, though examples of ancient sculpture and architecture abounded in Italy, and were used as models for those arts during the fifteenth century, examples of ancient paintings were few, and except in the debased forms in which they were found in late Roman times exerted little influence upon painting. The pictorial arts continued through an unbroken tradition from medieval times, and came to constitute, as the movement developed, the really original art of the Renaissance. In Venice especially, where the spirit of independence was so great, the theme of development was kept pure, and only in later centuries became infected with eclecticism, which quickly brought down the qualities of painting elsewhere. The mosaics of the earlier centuries had educated the public to

appreciate pictures as well as serving at a time when books were few. Though Giovanni Bellini—perhaps the greatest Venetian painter of the fifteenth century—and his followers continued to paint religious subjects of unusual refinement, the art of painting was not for long confined to the Church. It began to glorify the state, and later the desires of private individuals in portraiture and easel pictures. Painting, economically cheap at the time, became extensively used in public buildings and private palaces, and formed a perfect vehicle for expressing the ideas of the Renaissance. The delight in life and pageantry, the new-formed appreciation of personal beauty—public glory and personal lyricism—were all celebrated and perpetuated in painting. . . . Painting was used for the twin purposes of propaganda and pleasure. . . . The world seemed young again; people were handsome; religion was sincere; and the clerics were under control. . . .

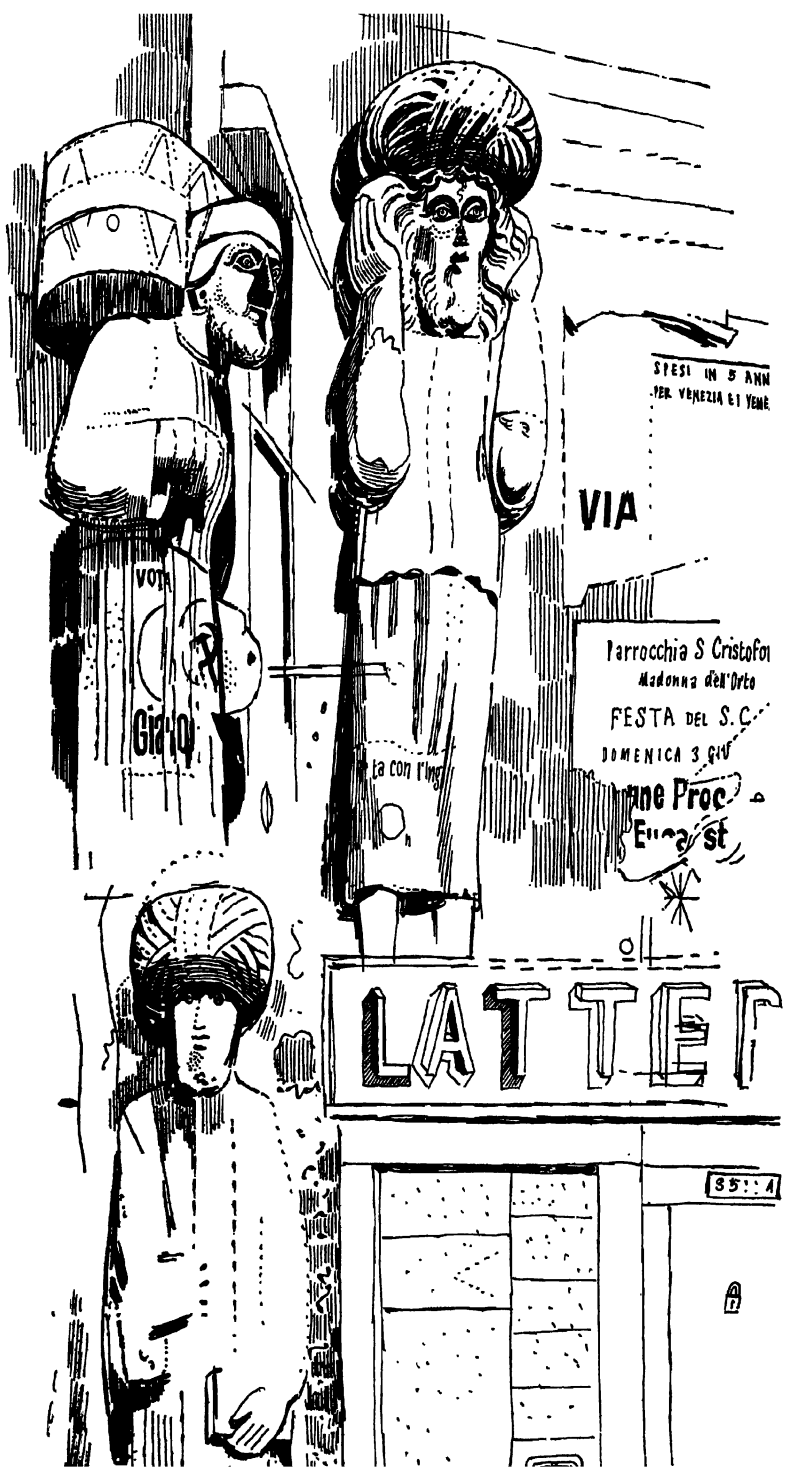
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THE great pageant paintings of the old Doge's Palace were destroyed in the fire of 1577, but the series of paintings done by the same artists for the various Schools of Venice—the Guildhalls of the Mutual Aid Societies—give some hint of their magnificence. Yet by the time the artists were employed in the Schools, the subjects of the paintings—the stories of the various patron saints—were already becoming secularized: they had a half-domestic quality, as though all happenings, sacred and profane, had taken place in contemporary Venetian settings. The members of the guilds could not only identify themselves with the histories of their saints, but what is more, we might guess, their saints were given the honour of almost residential status in Venice. It is little wonder that these paintings achieved extraordinary popularity and suggested to certain noble houses the eventual possibility of eliminating the saints entirely and having themselves glorified in painting. . . . (The portrait must always be the outcome of painting, even, in its last analysis, the self-portrait!)

One peculiarity of the early Renaissance style in Venice is that Venetian Gothic persisted longer than the Gothic style in other towns. And there exists in these paintings an engaging style of architectural setting which is purely Venetian and which, while rarely using the pointed arch, only half digested the elements of classical architecture, and so, combining these elements with Gothic crest-

ings and Lombardic wall inlays, they created with unusual refinement their own æsthetic. Furthermore, there is a fine harmony in the costumes of the period, for in no instance did they attempt to dress like the Romans, whose architecture and triumphs were to exert such an overwhelming influence in the final stages of the Renaissance. . . . It is perhaps a blessing that men are always interested in the latest fashions, even during periods of revival, and reserve the toga for their statues. . . . The costumes of the period, borrowing so much from the recent past of Gothic heraldry, were of extreme elegance, and never at any period has the youthful figure been so well exploited. The fashions were essentially the fashions of youth, and had the extraordinary effect of making human beings look like gorgeous birds. In fact, the peacock, that recurring motif in Venetian art, used hitherto as a Christian symbol of resurrection, had now reappeared in human form at the revival of classicism. Yet this birdlike pride of costume was not foppish but the plumage of Venetian masculinity in the full confidence of adolescence. (The older men, with excellent taste and detachment, discreetly dressed themselves in long robes and cloaks: but the pictures are full of young men, and it is the latter who really are celebrated, though the older ones are given their full dignities.)

In the series of paintings done by Carpaccio for the School of St. Ursula we are shown, without exaggeration, costumes which resolve themselves into feathers, ruching, pearls, lacing, fine brocades, rich velvets and snowy linen, contrasted with a constantly changing variety of hose of smooth heraldic patterns. This period marked the height of the art of hose, and never before or since have men's legs been so superbly decorated, nor with such individuality. Legs too, at this time, at least in youth, finished in the proper places, and were offset by tight waists, short tunics, exaggerated sleeves and shoulders, shoulder-length hair and round caps, with or without feathers. The figure, armed with stiletto or sword, was finally hung with a short cloak, the hands encased in embroidered and tasselled gloves. . . . As always, among the crowds of Venetians moved the stately figures of Mohammedans in enormous turbans and shining brocades. . . . How very harmonious are these scenes against the architectural backgrounds—the Oriental-Western motifs, the onion domes, the gilded balls and crosses, the spiky Gothic crestings, the rhythmic rows of arches, the crenellation of the towers, the "minaret" motifs, the waving flags and slashed pennants snaking in the wind. Here,



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too, in architecture and costume alike is the essential æsthetic of heraldry—the roundel, the lozenge, the square and the stripe. The animals, too, are improved by art, by shaving and clipping, by leaving tufts, while, especially in Carpaccio's paintings (he must have been a lover of animals and birds, and particularly of dogs), are the tame birds of Venice, the popinjay, the peacock and the dove, strutting and perching among the marbles, second only in importance to the youths themselves.

In Carpaccio's world of splendid adolescents and exotic pets is to be found the essential motif of Venice, the ageless sea-dream, where, out of the sunny hours, the mysterious mists and fogs, the epileptic storms of thunder and lightning, out of their isolation in the sea, secure from the rest of the world, life was lived at a higher pitch and produced an unusual sensitivity. The nearest living creatures to the Venetians have always been the harmless little monsters of the Adriatic. If they stooped down outside their islands they dredged monsters, and, in the congestion of their exotic city, the clear feverishness of the place produced an art of beautiful but harmless delirium—a man made æsthetic of marble, precious stones, glass, fur, feather, hair and skin, all teased into harmony with the fantastic things to be found in the sea. . . . Yet at this time, saved by the sanity of the period, it was essentially manly; later, when the sense of beauty overlapped from the normal to the abnormal—as beauty must always do at some point if it is persisted in—perverse and grotesque elements crept out and made a sinister Venice. . . . But here the constants remain—the scenes slide into each other against the same background, people change costumes but gaze out of the same eyes. There is the same colour always, the same *dream* of Venice.

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IN the series of *The Miracle of the Holy Cross*, painted by Bellini, Carpaccio, Mansueti, Bastiani and Diana for the School of St. John the Evangelist, the backgrounds are no longer half imaginary but show authentic scenes of contemporary Venice. . . .

In Gentile Bellini's painting of the *Procession of Corpus Christi* in the Piazza San Marco the Basilica is seen with the original Byzantine mosaics over the archways of the doors and in the four upper arches. Apart from the mosaics—of which this painting is the only record we have—regrettably replaced by those we have to look at

today, the Basilica is unchanged, though the crockets, canopies, pinnacles, as well as the four Horses, were a blaze of gold. In those days the buildings on the right-hand side of the Piazza were level with the line of the Campanile; the Piazzetta dei Leoncini was smaller, blocked by an archway; the Clock Tower not yet built, but the Flag Standards are there. The extraordinarily stately procession moves from the Porta della Carta down the side of the Piazza and across the front of the picture, leaving the centre of the Piazza free for the wandering groups. The young men strut like birds; there are loungers and Mohammedans; a stall for the sale of trinkets; a group of musicians. . . . The over-forties have sober robes of great dignity and perpendicularity. . . . The clergy are identical in their white albs; the rhythm of the arcading, the crestings of the parapets, and the repetition of chimneys are quite hypnotic and convey delightfully the slowly drifting movement of the procession. . . .

Carpaccio's painting of the Rialto shows the Relic freeing some unfortunate from a demon, but the subject is almost an excuse for a picture of the crowded scene on the Grand Canal. . . . The Canal is possibly slightly narrower than it is today. The buildings rise sheer and cliff-like from the water's edge. The bridge is of wood, with an enclosed passage-way and centre drawbridges to allow clearance for masted ships. All the buildings are in the Venetian Gothic style except the Palazzo San Silvestro, which has a hint of the Renaissance transformation yet to come. The skyline is broken by the typical funnel-like and highly decorated chimneys, and washing is hanging out on poles, then as now. Against the dark water of the Canal, a deep blue-black, are the figures of lithe gondoliers in feathered caps, short tunics and decorated tights. There is a Negro gondolier in the foreground with red cap and upright feather; tunic with white shirt bursting from it; tights with a design of black and white cubes upon the thighs, golden garters above the knees, blue and white stripes over the knees and calves, and red shoes. In one gondola is one of Carpaccio's untidy white dogs, with a collar of bells. . . . The gondolas of those days had not developed the coxcombs of shining steel, but were a cross between the present gondola and the *sandolo*—now used for more humdrum jobs. They were more like oriental black slippers upon the water. . . . The canal and the *fondamente* have the same busy appearance as today, with the crowds moving and gliding. . . .



Bellini's painting of *The Finding of the Holy Cross* in the Canal of San Lorenzo takes us into one of the side canals. The dignities of the Piazza and the glitter of the palaces are not here: the painting is given over to men and women who are more staid and solid and much older. . . . Along with their ladies, the men are distinctly fat, but though their portliness is hidden by long black robes, the bulbousness of the heads and busts of the ladies are exaggerated by tight dresses. They are tightly laced and criss-crossed with rows of pearls; their hair is braided and hung excessively with pearls and veils, their ears and necks with more pearls, while some have coronets. What they have lost of youth they have gained in wealth and jewellery: art is compensating for lost beauty. . . . The houses on the quaysides have heavily barred windows, to guard against burglars, or perhaps to protect the maidens from wandering lovers, who seem traditionally to have regarded Venetian balconies as husbands regard the threshold. . . . Window shutters were used then as now; the windows, when glass was used, were made of small discs of flattened drops leaded together, looking like the skins of fishes. . . . There are boats upon the canal; the bridge is thronged with people; a boy clings dangerously to the parapet. A Negro with loin cloth appears on a small landing-stage on the right, watched by a serving-maid. In the water in this painting are the weird figures of bald-headed monks retrieving the Relic from the canal. The water fills out their cassocks like white clouds. Kneeling on the right is a particularly hard looking row of successful business men.

The painting by Mansueti of the scene outside the church of San Lio is teeming with life. The engaging Venetian custom of throwing your best Persian carpet or brocaded bedspread over your window-sill when an object of religious veneration passes the house is common today, though to judge by this picture the quality of the fabrics has seriously deteriorated. . . . Leaning on their carpets or standing behind the window grilles are the severe ladies; while above them the servants peep out of their oven-like attics. One of these is taking in the washing among the funnel chimneys. A boy, in the middle distance, chases a cat over the rooftops with a stick. Builders are arranging cloth awnings to protect themselves from the sun while they work; a boy underneath lets his pet monkey crawl along the cornice, while a peacock struts on the parapet of San Lio. Peacocks must have enjoyed immunity to wander and

trail at will all over the town. . . . Below, the streets are crowded and the shops are closed, perhaps as much to avoid pilfering as out of respect; a butcher's man carries a wooden box on his head, with the neck and head of a plucked fowl hanging down like a tassel.

In the other picture by Mansueti the scene is of the interior of a palace. We have some difficulty today in visualizing these clean and trim interiors, because of discoloration, dilapidation and the earnest though devastating restorations—as in the case of the Ca' d'Oro. But this picture gives a very clear idea of such a palace in its heyday. . . . The marbles are new, the carving crisp, the gilding fresh. The neat rows of the embossed coffers of the ceiling glitter, as do the gilded edges of the window mouldings, the picking-out of the carvings on the fireplace, the gilded capitals, the balusters and hand rails. Gold is everywhere added to the polished surfaces of precious marbles, sumptuously but with reserve. In this spacious and well-proportioned interior, on the decorative landing-stage, the staircase and in the loggia, there is a moving throng of fashionables: proud patricians in their long, perpendicular gowns, with decorative page-boys moving among them, delivering messages and busy on small errands. At the foot of the staircase a Moorish servant sits with a chained cheetah. . . . There is a little dog; a hooded falcon. . . . Splendid youths in embroidered tunics and striped tights, hands on hips, lounge with easy grace against marble column and balustrade. . . . While at the top of the staircase stand the monumental ladies. Their fine, severe, full-length dresses, low-cut, are discreetly edged with pearls. They carry their heads with grace and pride; the hair is braided to build up the clear, sweeping profiles. Unlike the men's, the ladies' dress is not fantastic, but relies rather on the innate beauty of the figure: it is almost demure when the figure is slim and not too much adorned; but when the figures are stout the forms burst out, and the idea of rotundity carries on happily into pearls and balls of amber. . . . At a time when the bird-motif was so well expressed in costume, it seems right that the men should have worn the exotic plumage while the ladies remained discreet: the men glowed with colours and variegated patterns, exploited every point of their charms, strutted like peacocks: the ladies relied on their essential shapes, knowing that nature had endowed them with powers that men could not imitate. . . . For ever we will think of the face of Simonetta Vespucci as representing this

type of North Italian beauty, fair, simple, guileless at least in appearance, and of those thousands of strutting youths proudly showing off their finery. . . . The men discreetly relinquished the charms of youth and clothed themselves with reasonable austerity, advancing artistically by easy stages to costumes fitting their degrees of age. The ladies, however, spending so much time upon their balconies and in their vast palaces, could hardly be blamed for going from strength to strength as the years went by, and occupying their time with their jewel boxes and beauty preparations.

Yet the simplicity of women's appearance at this time is deceiving, for though the men allowed themselves the most elaborate and varied costumes, it seems that they wholeheartedly supported the Church in restraining women from likewise breaking out into finery. In public at least the result was one of simplicity, but in the privacy of their own homes, where they spent a great deal of time, the art of beautification was indulged on a grand scale. The lovely Venetian women, to preserve the freshness of their complexions, are said to have slept with slices of raw veal—previously soaked in milk—upon their faces, and during the day to have spent the idle hours in applying pastes and creams made from gum, lime, ants' eggs and ashes. The ideal of blonde hair, a colour by no means common in Italy, necessitated the use of bleaching waters and the invention of a hat which consisted of a rim only, in which they sat in the sun upon their balconies to advance the process. . . .

Carpaccio's painting, variously called *The Ladies of Venice* and *The Courtesans*, perhaps the most intimate domestic painting of the time, shows two ladies idling upon their balcony. (This painting, with everything cut in half down the left-hand side, looks like the detail of a larger one, but we can only sigh vainly for the rest.) It creates an atmosphere of sunny afternoons, of the delightful aimlessness of balconies. . . . Two high-bosomed ladies sit gazing, abstractedly, at members of the domestic menagerie. . . . In the foreground, the lady in brocaded velvet and red skirt leans forward, one hand holding the paw of a little dog, white and hairless, with a wart upon its cheek and a collar of bells. With her other hand she tugs at a leather lead which a hound is grasping in its jaws. The second rests her arm upon the marble parapet, where there are urns of flowers, a ripening pomegranate and two fat doves. A parrot is at her feet, its claw raised; nearby a thick-soled going-out shoe lies where it has been kicked off. In one of the arches of the parapet a small

boy reaches out to grasp a peacock which is slowly walking along. . . .

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THE countryside and the mountains existed for the Venetians as the mainland existed for sailors permanently afloat upon a gilded barge. . . . The low green trees and the distant fringe of the Euganean Hills were always across the water, lit by the sun or appearing and disappearing in the mists. At home there were the crowded water-lanes, the narrow alleys, the forced intimacy—always the buildings of bricks and marble, the caged birds, the tame peacocks, the cultivated flowers upon the balconies, the man-made pleasures of pageant and festa. The countryside, as for all pent in Venice, became a dream-world, half-forgotten, in which figures moved about upon tasks far removed from the seafaring life. Yet the basic dream of the Renaissance was a pastoral idyll in which man and nature existed side by side, without terrors: man glorified and in harmony with the landscape. In was little wonder, then, that at this time the interest in landscape painting increased, or that the figures which moved about the landscapes were the ideal men of the Renaissance; or that later, as the mood developed, if we look closer, or when they strayed up to the front of the picture, we discover that they were Venetians. . . . The figures in the religious paintings were healthy Venetians set in ideal landscapes: the saints were impersonated by the men and women of the Piazza. People became models for the saints as much as the saints were models for the people: at first anonymously, yet no less real. . . . Later the faces were individualized into portraits, impersonating no one, and the landscape receded to a glimpse beyond brocaded shoulders, later still to fade entirely, to be replaced by a dark background or a window-ledge of marble with nothing but the sky beyond. . . . The mind wanders—strays out into the clear morning-landscape of Bellini in which religious incidents take place: or else discovers small pastoral incidents whose meaning is now lost in forgotten customs; or returns to Venice and Carpaccio's busy scenes upon the quaysides. The men and the background mix ideally, against clear or darkening skies—the permanent background of Venetian life—but throughout runs the strain of poetry, of man's relationship to the landscape, of his belief in his own pre-eminence among the changing seasons. . . . The most haunting painting in Venice, in which this lyrical mood is most

strongly expressed, is Giorgione's *Tempesta*. . . . As though to mark the passage of this early day of the Renaissance, Bellini painted morning-light, Carpaccio the full light of day, and Giorgione the late afternoon. . . .

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THERE is no more romantic figure in painting than Giorgione, whose legend is shrouded in a bright cloud of mystery, through which we get occasional glimpses of a charming personality. His paintings are few—some twenty in all—and, as though to anticipate his place as a painter of ideal youth, the fates were kind to him for our sakes, and he had the good fortune to die young. We are left with the work of a young artist, guileless and unspoilt, who worked through the idealistic years of his own life, in a period when youth was the passion, who never grew old or lived long enough to say a crabbed or cynical thing. In his personality came to be embodied the desires of the age: whether it was that Giorgione revealed to his companions the ideal, or whether the ideal, already apprehended, found its expression in his life, must for ever remain a mystery. Vasari says of him that he was “. . . of extremely humble origin, but was nevertheless very pleasing in manner.” Born at Castelfranco, he was brought up in Venice. “He took no small delight in love passages, and in the sound of the lute, to which he was so cordially devoted, and which he practised so constantly, that he played and sang with the most exquisite perfection, insomuch that he was, for this cause, frequently invited to musical assemblies and festivals by the most distinguished personages.”

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IN the *Tempesta* dark clouds are coming up from the east, and lightning plays across the sky. In the middle distance are buildings in the Venetian style with simple round arches and a dome; yet set, mysteriously, in a green landscape; a city transposed, like a mirage, into the countryside. The time must be late afternoon, when night is coming up over Istria and the piles of clouds break loose and bank up behind Venice, clouds in which the thunder rolls and the lightning flashes. From the west the sun still shines and touches the trees, the lawns and the buildings and picks out the sparkling water of the stream. . . . Deep green shadows are cast among the tamarisks; soft shadows among the moss-covered rocks. . . . Upon a plinth of

bricks, by the water's edge, stand two broken columns, while behind is a simple screen of architecture with pilaster, arches and roundels of marble: a hint of classical ruins. In the foreground upon the grass sits a young mother suckling her baby. She is unclothed, with a white cloth over her shoulder as though she had but recently bathed. To the left, but not looking at her, though his head is turned, stands a young man, leaning upon a long staff. . . . There is nothing to identify these figures: he is neither a soldier nor a gipsy, though he has been called both; she is just a mother with a child. They are neither of them saintly; there is no stylization about them: yet they dominate the scene. They are simply a man, a woman and a child in a summer landscape in late afternoon: with rocks, sprays of foliage, a clear stream, a hint of past greatness in the ruins, the busy city beyond the bridge banished, like care, into the background, while above rumbles the tempest, heralding the night. . . . About this picture is a wistful air, a sad tranquillity, yet a confidence in the only truths of our natures we shall ever be certain of: it is one of the purest statements ever made by man about himself, quite without affection, without style, of great simplicity.

The romantic dream of Poliphilus had become Giorgione's lyrical assertion of reality. . . .

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OF many Early Renaissance buildings in Venice I will concern myself with only four, those which to my mind convey the flavour of the period in its main aspects—a church, an important public building and two palaces.

Santa Maria dei Miracoli, built by Pietro Lombardi, was restored at the end of the nineteenth century, and though one can seldom approve of restorations done in that period, the results in this church are not offensive, as they might easily have been in a building of a more elaborate kind. Pietro Lombardi's architecture is one of essences: of the rectangle, the circle, the square: all his other forms are derived from these—the rectangular box, the cylinder, the cube, the polygons, the dome and the other forms made up of their interlocking. Into these primal shapes he cut simple apertures, circular and rectangular; softened intersecting planes with mouldings; placed pilasters and springing arches, shallow and almost flat, upon the walls; and then decorated them only at the points of greatest interest with inlaid discs of contrasting marble. This is not an



architecture of archæology: it is the Florentine fantasy of classicism turned Venetian. It has the flavour of boat-building about it, not the flavour of unearthed ruins. . . . Santa Maria dei Miracoli is my favourite Venetian church—a building, in its exterior aspect, of unusual harmony; well knit, compact; built upon a small site, one side rising sheer from a canal. Other than these inlaid discs and few simple mouldings and decorations, the ornaments never obtrude. There is a feeling of calm about the building, of reasonableness; nothing of Byzantine sensuousness, of Italian Gothic *gaucherie*, or the hysteria and bombast of the Baroque. Unlike the Olympian perfection of Palladio, as expressed in *Il Redentore*, its perfection is one of personality, it retains the marks of eccentricity. It is human perfection, not universal. . . . Palladio's architecture never smiles, its ornaments are rhetorical though refined; the humour of the sculptures and ornaments of the Baroque are satires of Ancient Roman gravity. But Lombardi enjoys a quiet humour, which seems to come from a simple happiness. . . . It is an architecture which links with Giorgione, yet is purely Venetian: the same spirit in an island, not a pastoral setting.

It is the mark of good architecture that it can employ ornament without losing dignity (a quality almost entirely absent today). There is all the difference between putting up an elegant and efficient shelter and creating a happy building. Humour and sense of proportion go together: they preserve the balance between the over-serious and the banal. Wit and sophistication belong to the arts of exaggeration; they verge on the comic and eventually dissolve in the tragi-comic and the grotesque. The humour of the Lombardi is the expression of balanced personalities, a form of contentment. This is nowhere better expressed than in the sanctuary of Santa Maria dei Miracoli. . . . Here is the very best mixture of the Classical and Christian traditions. The ornaments are restrained and delicate, always inventive, never in any passage dull. Round the bases of the two main pilasters of the sanctuary arch are some of the happiest examples of Renaissance ornamental sculpture I have seen in Venice. Everything is small and intimate: no figure exceeds sixteen inches in height: every motif is subordinated to the architectural scheme, yet very richly worked. There are various arabesque panels, of goats, satyrs, gryphons and bulls; dolphins' heads terminating in acanthus scrolls; cherubs and mermaids playing among vines. . . . As though the nature gods had made peace for once with the Church and had



come here to gambol. . . . On the balustrade of the choir are four very fine three-quarter-length statues, especially an angel and two female figures—all standing as though rooted in marble. . . . Among the sculptures and ornaments of the sanctuary there are children and birds everywhere . . . and buds and pods, tendrils and flowers, bunches of new-set grapes. . . .

Yet the wide nave pleases me very little: there is too much split marble. And the barrel vault is exceedingly complicated, a gilded puzzle out of which peep a hundred unrecognizable saints. In this part of the church I suspect the restorers have been at work.

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LA SCUOLA GRANDE DI SAN MARCO and the Palazzo Dario are two other buildings in the same style. I have not, however, been inside either, so I can only remark upon the façades: the former is now the Civic Hospital and the latter a private palace. Both carry into secular architecture the same principles as are found in Santa Maria dei Miracoli. The hospital building has a façade of discreet pomp: it echoes, in the flat, the bubble-motifs of the Basilica of St. Mark. It is a memory of Byzantium seen through the medium of a half-understood classicism: Byzantine architecture awakening. It is a screen of true Lombardic discretion but of great richness: civic pomp and pride at the possession of a fine building, expressed in columns, mouldings, floreated pediments. Of unusual interest is the treatment of the lower part of the façade, where, of all miraculous things, are stone pictures: low reliefs of architectural perspectives, not in stucco but in marble. The two great lions flank the main doorway of the building under mock *loggie*; farther on, to the right, under vistas of flattened arches, are groups of figures, some of them in turbans. . . . This façade, now weather-stained and discoloured, must have been a glorious sight when new.

The Palazzo Dario leans slightly to one side with age. . . . The seventy-five roundels of inlaid marble are like the mouths of trumpets. The chimneys, too, standing around the cornice of the house, are like trumpets. . . . The whole building is musical—trumpeting domestic pride.

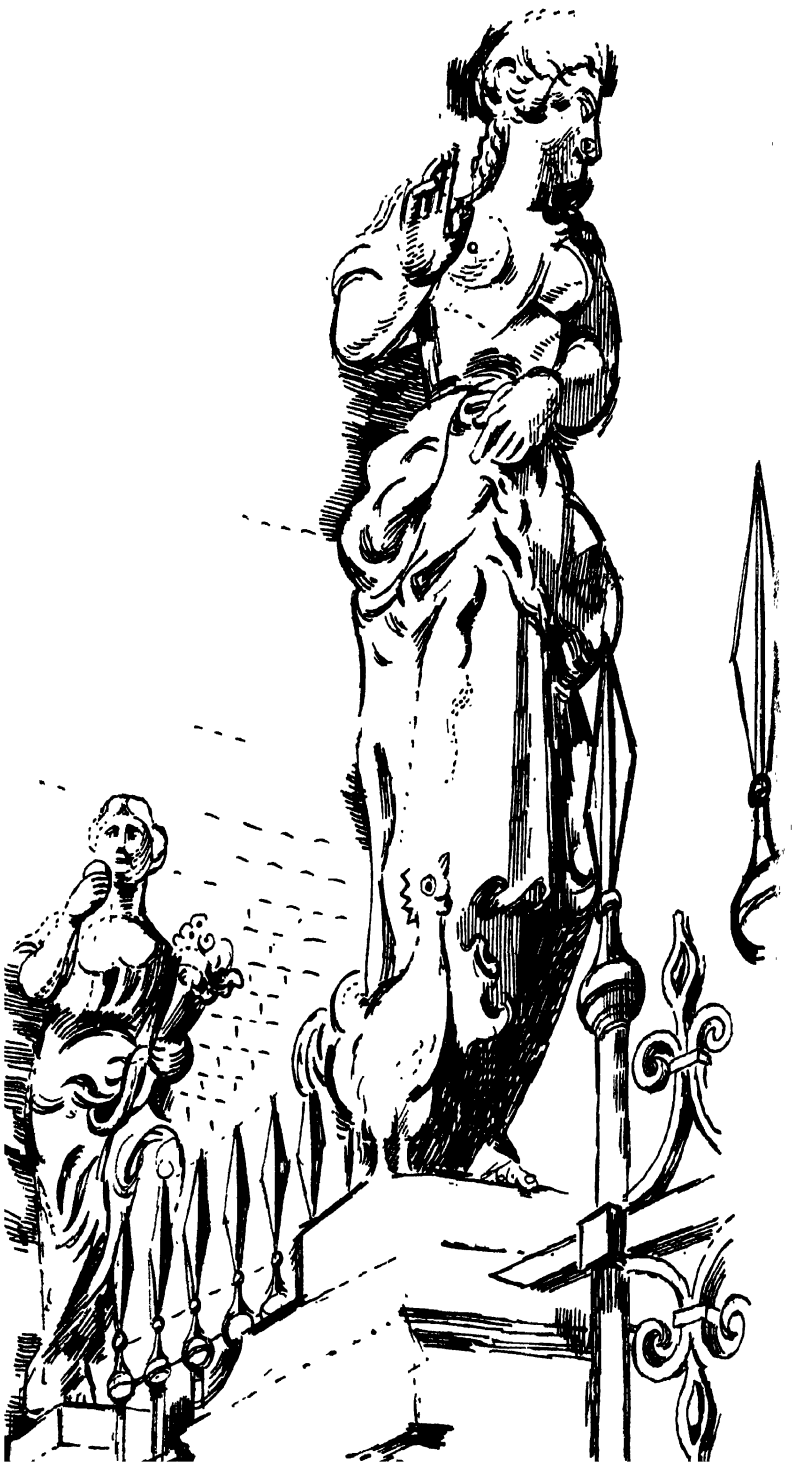
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THE Ca' d'Oro, built in the early part of the century, is an example of Venetian Gothic lingering on to express the sophistication of

domestic life. The ornamentation of the façade—the richest and most elaborate Gothic building in Venice—has nothing whatsoever to do with the Church. It is coral-gothic, the gothic of the sea: a purely Venetian phenomenon. It marks the degree of complete secularization of the style, used in this case for romantic reasons. The façade of the Ca' d'Oro is pure decoration; sophisticated self-expression: a wilful eccentricity used at a time when people were dreaming of ancient Rome. Though there is a harmless perversity about it, there is only the faintest hint of over-ripeness. . . . It has a witty air, of architectural smartness. . . . Yet, in spite of its decorative function, it still manages to be a piece of architecture: behind the elaborately fretted arcades are the great *loggias*; the balconies are the apron-stages of the rooms beyond. . . . It is upon such balconies that Carpaccio's ladies sunned themselves, in such *loggias* that they were entertained by their domestic menageries—peacocks, monkeys, children.

The Ca' d'Oro today is a husk of a palace, not very well restored, but there is sufficient shape about the rooms to hint at the richness it once possessed. No family with such a façade to their house could have lived a simple life. We must turn to Mansueti's picture of the interior of a palace to bring life into it again. . . . It is a memory: but like the whole period, a memory of youthful splendour.





## Cinquecento

IT is with a feeling of regret for the lost youth of the Quattrocento that I suffer myself to be overwhelmed by the heavy adult splendours of the ceilings of the Palazzo Ducale. It is never for very long that I can submit myself to those acres of magnificent paintings and those endless masses of gilded carving in the Sala del Maggior Consiglio and the Sala del Senato. . . . With the tearless sadness of manhood, yet brimful of devitalizing admiration for the perfections of the period, I must extricate myself from the odour of battles, plots, conspiracies, intrigues and hypocrisy—all the well-known features of adult life—and escape once more into the streets, where the sun shines and people are concerned with life at a simpler level. . . . Likewise, to review the art of the sixteenth century from Titian to Veronese would be to write another book and certainly does not come within the scope of this one, so I do not intend to linger among the splendours of the High Renaissance, except to follow quickly some clues to the Venetian mentality of the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. I am concerned with the more lowly human comedy which, from now onwards, since we have left the exquisite and almost painful beauties of the fifteenth century behind, gathers momentum and speeds us along to the decadence of Venice. The miseries of our own times are burdensome enough without unearthing past miseries in the complicated world of wars, the intrigues of princes and popes, the cruelties of the Turks, the exploits of the Pirates of Dalmatia or the threatening horrors of the Inquisition. So though we cannot understand the arts of Venice without some reference to the events of history, we can, in spite of them, take refuge upon these islands as the Venetians did, to look for the more pleasant results of life. It is to their everlasting glory that their chief concern was with peace, that at home all their efforts were bent upon enjoying it, and that, commensurate with the enlightenment of the times, they endeavoured to relieve want and human suffering among themselves. They intrigued because they had to, and they shed as much blood as anybody else, but their chief interest was

to remain independent and intact, and to enjoy themselves at home.

With the increased sense of dignity and the mature enjoyment of their not-easily-won wealth, they took to religion again, not as a paean of praise for the joy of being alive as in the Early Renaissance, but more as adults do with a sense of doom. It was, however, a personal religion, indulged amidst material comfort, comfort they were determined to maintain in spite of the hypocrisy of the Church, which constantly threatened them with massacre and excommunication, and of which, as usual, though they repelled the armies, they took little notice. (At this time Italian scholars fleeing from the universal miseries of the Inquisition found shelter in the liberal atmosphere of Venice, and by so doing enriched the humanist tradition. . . .) But, sincerely and magnificently as this new outburst of religion is expressed, as in the art of Tintoretto—whom I consider to be the greatest of all Venetian painters—I still find it heavy and overwhelming in sentiment. . . . Michelangelo was predicting titanic disasters upon mankind from the very heart of Christendom, while Venetian painters, by no means unmoved by the seriousness of man's estate, devoted their time almost equally between their personal interpretations of religion and their glorification of the state. The quality of ambivalence—which runs like a thread throughout all things Venetian—used the imagery of two worlds, the pagan and Christian, to express the prevailing sentiments of the time. . . . The *Apotheosis* of Venice by Veronese in the Palazzo Ducale is inextricably mixed in the mind with the *Assumption of Our Lady* by Titian on the High Altar of the Frari. . . . But, while appreciative of the latter as a psychological necessity of the time, with the former the theme of this book is concerned, for in it is expressed that element of pleasure which is the dominant recurring motif of Venice—pleasure at all times fantastic, and at this time grandiose as well.

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THE pastorals of Giorgione developed into the Bacchanals of Titian. The satisfying ideas of paganism—catering so well for the many aspects of pleasure within the human mind—were rendered with a fulsomeness and jollity that had never occurred before, perhaps not even in truly pagan times. The technical accomplishments of oil painting and the mastery of the arts of perspective and

figure drawing combined the fantasies of nature gods with the realities of landscape and atmosphere—with summer storms, lightning, cloudscapes, sunlight, the starry heavens—and they romped and caroused among the glades and floated through the skies most convincingly. . . . Titian created a world of intoxicating light and colour peopled with robust figures, and though there were the hints of decay, as in a garden at the end of summer before the petals drop, it was a powerful world, where adults unashamedly enjoyed themselves. . . .

Against this mental background of convincing mythology the real Venice was glorified in painting. But whereas in Carpaccio's paintings the Venetians were young and apparently mainly interested in showing off their figures and clothes upon the quaysides, now the scene moves indoors or into the courtyards of palaces, and the men and women are much older, and though more splendidly dressed than ever, their lives seem to have become dominated by intrigue. The strutting youths have become courtiers: life has become complicated and everyone seems interested in power. The youth has become the man of the world. . . . Behind it all lurks an element of danger, and in the eyes of the great portraits of the period there is a sadness. Greatness of personality was achieved against a background of care.

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THIS element of fear, sometimes of foreboding, must not, however, be exaggerated, for Venice was still powerful and wealthy, and the dominant feeling of the painting of the period is one of triumph. Still the moods of elation and disquiet swing backwards and forwards, as though, in the hour of triumph, doubt of man's omnipotence was sweeping over the lagoons. . . . Veiled under the symbolism of religion, this disquiet appears in the most unexpected places. . . . In Tintoretto's painting of *The Creation of the Animals* the element of foreboding is particularly strong: the act of creation seems almost to be a loosening of fear upon the world; it seems to resolve the whole splendours of Venice into the wind-blown desolation from which they sprang. The very movement of the composition, from right to left, is contrary to the movement of annunciation. The figure of the Creator—a figure of spikes and lightning—flies along the shore of a sea in a rushing wind. The banks are populated with animals in a state of excitement, prancing, running, tense

and taut. A horse neighs, eyes dilated. Swans, cranes, herons and water-fowl fly swiftly over the sea, while in the receding swell, monsters and fishes ride the waves. . . . It seems almost as much a rush into oblivion, away from life, as a picture of creation. . . . And yet, at home, in the safety of the palace, in Veronese's *Annunciation*, the most splendid and spirited Angel of all time announces the message of hope, the recurring act of optimism. The Angel sweeps down obliquely from left to right on wings of black and vermilion, in a swirling mass of draperies of vermilion, rose pink and gold. . . . This is no quiet, secret annunciation, but a trumpeting of good news, to a Mary of the Palace. She receives the news with Renaissance satisfaction, leaning upon a pagan altar decorated with rams' heads, cherubs and festoons. . . . Behind this picture lies the whole settled existence of Venetian domestic life, the confidence of wealth, the surety of inheritance, the belief in power. The child would grow up to be a successful merchant or an admiral.

But in Tintoretto's *Massacre of the Innocents* fear is again let loose: this time in the streets, as though among people stripped of the protection of power. Moving masses of people rush along the arcades, drop over walls, and in the background struggle across a ditch that affords no safety from terror. . . . Likewise in his haunting painting of *The Removal of the Body of St. Mark from Alexandria* the scene might well be a setting in the Piazza when the marble pavements are awash with rain and the lightning flashes over the Basilica. The body of St. Mark, whose symbol is the lion, is lying pathetically in the arms of the merchants, while in the lashing storm figures are fleeing through the arcades. . . . On the other hand, Veronese's *Apotheosis of Venice*, in the Palazzo Ducale, is the most triumphant expression of confidence: Venice has become almost a goddess, a jewelled and brocaded matron floating upon a cloud, ministered to by deities and attributes. They are above a balcony crowded by noblemen and women, while below, on prancing horses, are warriors among a pile of arms. The Winged Lion peeps shyly through. . . .

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FINALLY, among this mass of magnificent painting, as though in affirmation of the basic reality of life, there are to be found an unusual number of banqueting scenes. No matter that in most cases they were pictures of biblical feasts or pictures of the Last Supper—Tintoretto painted six major works on this theme alone—they one



and all extol the recurring delights of the table. Their visionary qualities come second to the splendid social act, and the scenes are set in lowly houses as well as in great Renaissance palaces. . . . In the least grandiose of Tintoretto's paintings of the Last Supper—the small one in the church of San Trovaso, the scene, though reverently treated, might have taken place in any ordinary house in Venice. The group around the table, set with food and wine, is very lively—the figures lurching this way and that. One man reaches backwards for the wine bottle on the floor, the one beside him leans forward on to the table to catch the words of Jesus. Between them is an overturned rush-seat chair. Another leans over to raise the lid of a bowl upon the floor. . . . It is an intensely natural scene: with trestle table, stools and chairs; there are a cat and a serving boy standing by. On the staircase sits a woman with a distaff, and conversing in the loggia in the background two others, ghost-like and luminous. . . .

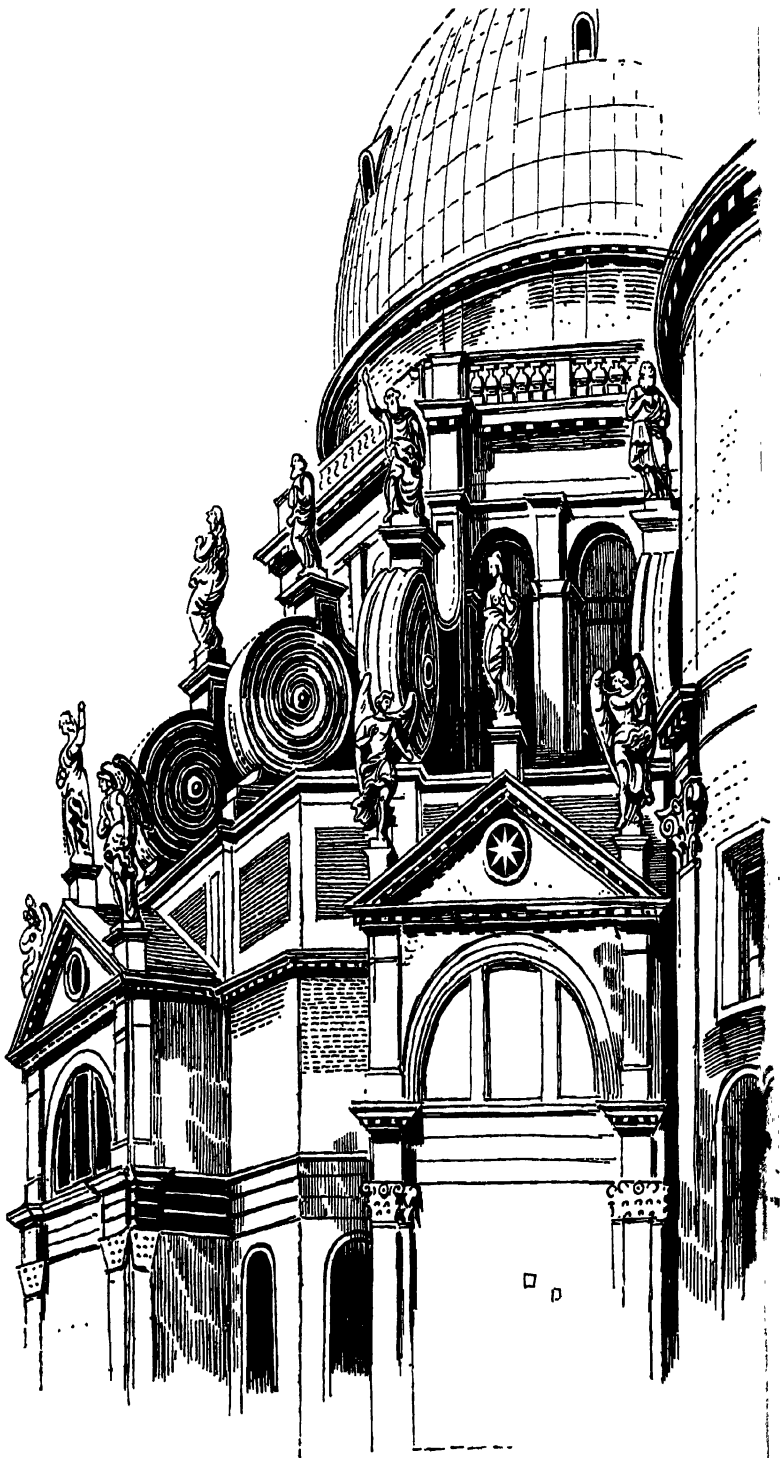
To feed ourselves is the beginning of the struggle for existence in primitive societies; to gorge ourselves at banquets seems to be the final expression of the triumph of commerce. It is hardly surprising, therefore, to find that at the end of the Renaissance, when Venice was entering upon her long period of brilliant decline, the delights of the table came to play such an important part. Banqueting is the end of empires, and from the loaded dinner table stem all the follies of decadence. . . . Also, as though to mark the lack of spiritual sustenance in the religion of the time, paintings of banquets came to fill a psychological need. They became not only a reminder of the famous meals of antiquity but also a constant reminder of the next meal: above all, they seemed to be an affirmation of the ability of Venetian enterprises to feed Venetians nobly. . . . The dinner table, as has often happened since in bourgeois society, became the hallmark of success. . . . It is still, however, with mild surprise that we discover that Veronese's *Supper in the House of Levi*—an enormous picture of extraordinary magnificence—should have been commissioned by the monks of SS. Giovanni e Paolo to decorate their refectory wall. It is a striking comment on the times and shows how thoroughly the ideas of the Renaissance had permeated even to places where at one time piety and asceticism had been the rule. . . . Never was there a greater excuse to paint a Renaissance banquet. . . . Against a fantasy of Ancient Roman architecture, filtered through the cheery wind-blown imagination of Veronese, where only one, rather insignificant, Gothic window revives a faint

memory of the Dark Ages, under a loggia of magnificent proportions, a great banquet is laid upon a table forty feet long. Amidst columns, balustrades and pavements of costly marbles, with dwarfs, buffoons, serving-boys and maids, costly plate, Moors and men-at-arms, sit the powerful and important—wealthy Venetian merchants, Councillors of State in vermilion and ermine, noblemen and their wives. . . . In spite of all this, the figure of Christ in the centre is powerfully conceived, as are also the two apostles beside him, but behind them, within a few feet, are two serving-boys in canary-yellow silk liveries holding Venetian glass goblets. . . .

It is fair to say that this painting aroused some slight, formal storm of protest, for a year after its completion in 1573 Veronese was summoned before the Sacred Tribunal in the Capella di San Teodoro and charged with irreverence for painting Our Lord at supper with "buffoons, drunkards, Germans, dwarfs and similar indecencies. . . ." Veronese, with a boldness that speaks well both for the respect paid to artists and the enlightenment of the period, defended himself by quoting the instance of Michelangelo, who "in the Papal Chapel at Rome painted our Lord Jesus Christ, His Mother, St. John and St. Peter, and all the court of heaven, from the Virgin Mary downwards, naked." . . . The court ordered him to repaint the picture within three months at his own expense, but the order was never enforced and it hangs today as on the day it was finished—a sumptuous banquet in Venice, at which Christ somehow happened to be present. . . .

In the paintings of this period the grotesque is beginning to appear. The quality of ambivalence is beginning to turn the world upside down. Dwarfs appear among the noble figures; buffoons sit at high tables, while, around the periphery of the scenes, figures of satire and unbelief peep over the balustrades. The tall hat, the hooked nose, the exaggerated belly appear among the crowds. The reality of life is becoming mixed up with characters of fantasy.





## Seicento

IT appears to have been one of the abiding characteristics of Venetians that though the rest of mankind have been tormented by ideas of heaven and hell—how to get to the former and how to avoid the latter—they have been better content to solve the immediate problems of living. Their spiritual experiences were absorbed into their art and architecture, and on those occasions when religion was allowed to interfere with affairs of state, their mystics and saints, like their caged birds, had to be imported. Miracles of a supernatural kind were few in Venice, but miraculous works of art were numerous. Thus though the idea of hell and judgment, after the early centuries at any rate, acted as small deterrent to their enjoyment of life, they nevertheless pulled up sharply at the idea of physical decay—that is to say, Death—and in common with the rest of Italy indulged in the excitements of baroque art. In Rome the Baroque was a perfect mortuary art, and skeletons lounge in every church and seem to stir the air with a beating of black wings, but in Venice, where the benefits of peace and wealth produced something like a perpetual holiday, the skeleton appeared at the festa, trimmed and garlanded or wearing the motley of Harlequin. Enigmatic Death (who puts a stop to all junketings!) took upon himself many guises, and his presence is always felt in Venetian Baroque—as indeed at all times in Venice—though he was never allowed to spoil the holiday. Human dignity and the belief in the glory of man were preserved in a period of art when men were apt to be reminded, with morbid pleasure and by the most violent artistic means, that all things end in the graveyard—monuments and men alike. Thus it is that the Venetian spirit finally conquered the Baroque, and churches, for ever reminding man of his dismal end, in the later stages of Venetian Baroque did not have upon their façades a single religious symbol. They became secular monuments to the earthly glories of certain noble Venetian families, and later, in a mood of truly horrifying cynicism, the sculptures mock at both man and death, and God Himself is unacknowledged. (It was this that gave Ruskin such a problem, as

in the case of that leering head sculptured at the base of the tower of Santa Maria Formosa, which seems to have made him almost sick with indignation. In his anger he condemned the art—which is an *amoral* activity—along with the immorality of the times, and thus, I believe, made a great mistake.)

The skeleton, as a symbol of Death, does not often appear in Venetian Baroque, though ideas of corruption lurk slyly behind masks and gestures in many perverse forms. Yet the Baroque was a perfect vehicle for certain aspects of the Venetian temperament, especially as a means of expressing religious and secular ideas in the most theatrical way possible. The indiscretion of admitting Death in his crudest form—of rotting flesh and worms, as in Rome—was, quite admirably I think, kept at bay. But they retained everything else: the same unbalanced, excessive statements, the same embarrassing ecstasies and astonishing realism. It is difficult for us today, now that the baroque tendencies in art have almost expended themselves, to conceive of the spirit which produced such excesses. So exactly the opposite to our own introverted and austere conceptions of painting and sculpture were the feelings that prompted the Baroque that it almost requires a reversal of our own ideals to come to terms with it. We are given to uneasy laughter, as when we are first confronted with the incongruous and pornographic, and we marvel that men dared to express so much; we are repelled and fascinated by their disclosures, but at the same time we are amused—though sadly—at emotions which would have been better left as private experiences. It would take a strangely histrionic temperament nowadays to experience sensations of true religion from such a façade as that of the church of San Moisè; nevertheless, the initial baroque impulse was religious, and works of real religious significance were produced, especially in painting. The Baroque was as suitable for glorifying man as for expressing the glory of God: yet all the time it contained the seeds of materialism; and though it ended in the grotesque and perverse, it remained full of an astonishing vitality to the last.

Our judgments are mainly æsthetic, and, being reared in the schools of psycho-analysis, we can enjoy the spectacle of the public confessional. We are astonished and invigorated by vitality as well as amused by artistic indiscretions. I can never deny the humanity of the Baroque: its failings are as glorious as its triumphs. It was not an art of fear: at its best it was a statement

of human confidence, at its worst it courageously enjoyed its own perversity.

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ABOVE all else I think that it is this intense liveliness, this almost hysterical preoccupation with movement that is its great attraction. We can enjoy the Baroque, now that we are no longer obsessed by the ideas that produced it, with as much gusto as we can enjoy a spectacular thunderstorm at sea while safely standing on dry land. So full of movement are baroque designs, so thronged with feelings and personalities, that when I think of sculptured figures, or figures painted upon a ceiling, I must always regard them as living creatures. It is almost impossible to think of them as sculpture and painting, so strong is the theatrical element. . . . Give them more than a glance, stay with them for any length of time, and the magic begins to work. . . . The figures seem to move. Angels arrive and depart, open and shut their wings; people stab each other; they writhe, they leap. Cherubs gambol and bombard each other with flowers and fruit; heroes flash their eyes, nod the plumes on their helmets. The saints publicly enjoy their solemn ecstasies—though an embarrassment to the rest. . . . The architecture (rarely true architecture) is equally lively and accommodating, so full of ramps to lean on, spandrels to lounge in, niches to swoon in, and with a hundred convenient ledges for trophies, urns and swags. . . . In real life banquets and parties usually take place upon the horizontal surface of the floor; nuptials are celebrated on flat beds: but in the Baroque everything takes place *vertically*, and thus necessitates that most delightful of all dream sensations—the act of flying. Figures in a baroque composition live an effortless vertical life among broken orders, going up and down, in and out, swirling, spiralling, swinging across, resting awhile with ease upon chasms and precipices, legs a-dangle; while upon the ceilings, for those figures which have strayed beyond the confines of the architecture, there are vast cloudscapes, where they can wander in Paradise, away, away, like birds, into the farthest distances . . . where they find not Jove with his cloud-encircled brow, but the Sacred Name of Jesus, somewhat incongruously engraved in Hebrew upon a bright cloud. . . . Meanwhile the wind blows always: gales for the heroes, zephyrs for the female saints, bleak, wintry winds for the old male saints and warm, humid winds for the young. The clouds roll and rumble in the heavenly ceilings, the sun breaks

through, and sends shafts of golden light down upon our astonished eyes. . . . The pagan and Christian worlds rise in the vapours of the mind.

### *San Moisè*

IF ever a church façade said "Enter" it is the façade of San Moisè. We cannot honestly say, however, that it is an invitation to worship: it is as though we were asked to a gay palace to find the entertainment of a lifetime. Thirty-two figures sport and gambol upon a system of cornices and broken pediments, which have no architectural function, resembling the rocks and ledges of an artificial cliff. Naked cherubs—the offspring of giants, large and unashamed, climb and slither as children do in real life. Angels, with the wind blowing their draperies, revealing their ankles, trumpet and revel. Enormous swags of flowers and fruit—now sadly stained by pigeons, who find this the most accommodating home in Venice after St. Mark's—hang heavily about the architecture, though in our time, after almost three hundred years of weathering, they have assumed the forms of apples, onions and turnips with centrepieces of cauliflower and outbursts of broccoli. But it is a grey and black jollity, a piece of festivity blackened with age, a muted celebration. . . . Over the central doorway, which in this instance must be dignified with the pompous name of "portal," there is a truncated obelisk supporting a bust. It is neither the bust nor the obelisk that is particularly remarkable, but the two monsters on whose rumps the obelisk rests. They are, I believe, though I cannot be sure, two camels, of all animals the most ugly, and of all animals the least likely to be encountered halfway up a vertical cliff; on closer inspection they may as well be dinosaurs, for they have the most un-camel-like of faces. Figures stand on either side—celestial camel drivers—in heavy robes which they are gathering up away from the snouts of the animals, as though in fear that they might root among their folds for apples. Two more figures are standing on the camels' backs and leaning against the obelisk, one holding a cornucopia, while the other, who might be Moses, holds a tablet of stone. High above this, on an outstanding corbel, is the figure of an apparently newly arrived angel. He leans forward in an attitude of tense excitement and blows his trumpet at us in the Campo San Moisè below. Large and languid figures, unaware or indifferent



to this sudden visitation—for such figures have lounged on broken arches and pediments ever since the figures of Night and Day discovered themselves on the Medici Tombs in Florence—lift their excessive draperies and grasp the surrounding rocks to prevent themselves from slipping. Above the angel is a piece of heraldry which has lost all semblance of the crispness of armour and slashed leather, and become a blazoned cloud as though sculptured with chisels of lightning. Higher still, against the sky, and exposed to a perpetual gale from the Adriatic, is a row of gesticulating figures holding those instruments of bronze which stone cannot imitate—swords, wands, rods and daggers. These figures are surely shouting some fevered message into the wind, some exhortation to cease from wicked ways, down to the Venetians and international tourists in the Campo (whose real interests, as always, are in strutting and gossiping, in showing off their clothes, their charms and their virility).

Thus far in this description of the façade we have only travelled up the centre bay—and there are three in all—but the elevation from the pavement to the sky has been voluptuous if pigeon-drenched. It is therefore almost a disappointment on entering the building to find that it is just a church. . . . Too much effort has been expended on getting us inside.

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THE interior of San Moisè has all the fashionable appointments of the period, but after the exuberance of the façade they appear unusually quiet. There is an air of sadness about the place, for the marbles of San Moisè have not worn well, most of the paintings have blackened to the point of obscurity and the remaining frescoes are scabrous and grey. In fact, there is little to detain us except the high altar, and this only because it is perhaps the worst altarpiece in Venice. In this period of emotional marble, when stones—for stones they are after all—somehow become fluid, move and take flight, we can never be sure, between glances, if statues have not shifted on to the other hip or whether another angel has arrived. Above the pediments, on which an immense marble transformation is taking place, there are no straight lines. We leave the land of architectural stability and are transferred to the scene on Mount Sinai. On a large pile of rocks, of polished marble some twenty feet high, for all the world like enormous pieces of wet liver fresh from the belly of some

monster, the Tablets of the Law are being dropped by a flying figure of Jehovah. He is surrounded by cherubs and trumpeting angels, who descend like a swarm upon the figure of Moses kneeling in an attitude of surprise at the summit of the rocks. His hair stands on end as in a whirlwind, and I believe, though I cannot be sure at this earthly distance, that he has two little horns on his forehead that make him the bull of the tribe. At the foot of the rocks is a group of figures in attitudes of selfconscious ecstasy and astonishment; on the left is a pharisee in horned mitre, one hand on hip and pointing at the altar beneath, while behind this whole extraordinary occurrence, on the real wall of the church, is a bad picture of heaven, with a score of sad angels floating and trumpeting in the faded glory of a late seventeenth-century twilight.

Other features of the sanctuary, which are attractive mainly because they are stupendous, are two huge gilded screens, some twelve feet high, which are placed on either side of the altar on certain occasions. They are in that debased but vigorous style in which mouldings, architraves and outgrowths of acanthus amalgamate into one swirling mass: as though an architectural setting, once peopled with figures who have since flown away, had become hot and started to melt. . . . These glittering screens, extending like molten volcanic rocks, complete the idea of a magic mountain. The assymetrical doorways cut into them might lead to some sacred grotto rather than to the sacristy. They form a sensuous background to the dramas of the church, and when the candles are lit upon the altar they reflect a blaze of glory down the whole length of the building. . . . On the other hand, the effect is so erotic that they would make a magnificent set of nuptial couches.

### *San Pantalon*

SAN PANTALON is remarkable today as an over-decorated Baroque church. It is on a very old site, but the original church has disappeared and all that remains of its furnishings is a painting of *The Coronation of the Virgin*, by Vivarini, shyly tucked away in a closed side chapel, as though the present church were ashamed of its beginnings. It was developed and redecorated about 1670, and the old one vanished in an orgy of debased baroque ornament and painting, the full extent of which only becomes evident as the eyes get accustomed to the permeating dark brown light. This gloomy

atmosphere is caused by an overwhelming but riotous ceiling painting by Fuminiani : a ceiling almost as big as that of the Sistine Chapel but in no other way resembling it. The subject of the painting is the Martyrdom and Glorification of St. Pantalon, but the painting is such a muddle and so discoloured that the incidents on first acquaintance are quite indistinguishable. It is, however, a remarkable work in many ways, if only for the *horses* which are romping upon the ceiling. These animals, in order to be visible from the floor below, are painted as big as, if not bigger than, elephants and are prancing along the painted cornices, their huge rumps leaning over into the church. We can only be thankful that they are not real horses. . . . A system of painted cornices, peopled with foreshortened views of giants, builds up a series of cleverly vanishing false architectural features above the real, and in so doing makes the church look three times its proper height. Muddled and complicated, the brown incidents take place in and out of the painted architecture, and, in the centre of the ceiling—the Glorification I can only presume—is a host of flying figures, mostly angels, moving upwards in a swirling mass to the figure of God the Father, as remote in the distance as the moon in daytime. The angels in this particular ceiling I have taken a dislike to, for they look very malevolent. They are sinister, with insects' wings—or are they bats' wings, or are they a crackling leathery swarm of pterodactyls? Not content with covering this great vault, Fuminiani allowed his figures to hang down below the line of the real arches, by extending his canvas on boards down the backs of arms and legs. The ceiling is in a bad state of repair and, sagging in places, has started to drop off. Another hundred years and one fine morning the congregation will be found suffocating under the cloth of a dusty and black Glorification. . . .

A feature of quite a minor kind, but cheerful after the ceiling, is a Crib in a small alcove. This is my first *Santo Bambino* in Venice . . . a doll of about eighteen inches, dressed in quilted white silk swaddling clothes sewn over with pearls; on its head a bonnet trimmed with white angora fur, and behind, a halo, a cirlet of gold set with gold stars. The doll lies very stiffly upon its side in a cot shaped exactly like the bottom half of a large Easter egg but encrusted entirely with shells, stuck on, grotto-wise, and painted gold. The edges of the cot are also trimmed with angora fur, and the whole is supported on twiddly legs of painted wire, surrounded by bunches and swags of

artificial flowers—roses, forget-me-nots and lilies of the valley. There are two electric candles on either side, and the walls of the alcove are covered with Sacred Hearts of tinsel, each one a thank-offering. . . .

### *I Gesuiti*

THE façade of the Jesuit Church, so near the open lagoon on the north side, is a success to halfway up its height. There is a fine effect of deeply undercut, massed Corinthian columns, with great niches for the statues of the Apostles, panels of ample decorations and above the main doorway an ornament of the Sacred Name of Jesus. Two angels have come to rest above the door and are swinging metal censers and, on the top of each fat column, making an imposing row, are breezy figures with metal haloes. . . . Thus far all is well, and here under normal circumstances we should expect a great tympanum, but it had to go a storey higher to give the end of the nave a window. At this stage invention failed, and there is no excitement until we reach the skyline, where there is an extremely lively collection of figures on marble clouds, as though the building were going up in smoke. These are perhaps the most breezy baroque figures in Venice to appear on a cornice outside a building. (I particularly like the view of them end-on when in a boat coming back from Murano. Then they rise above the red rooftops like a crowd of white-robed giants in animated conversation gazing down into the street below.)

The builders of this church, unlike San Moisè, intended the entry to be a surprise: and it is almost a pity to spoil it by describing it. Any description, however, will be beggared by the reality, for this church is truly one of the surprises of Venice. The interior scheme is of a nave with side chapels but no aisles, and with shallow transepts and chancel. But every square inch of the walls, over the entire church, is inlaid with the most sumptuous brocade design in white and *antico verde* marble, imitating in realistic folds and heavy drapes a real cloth. It is done on such a scale as to have a paralysing effect on the eye, for even though we know immediately that it is marble, the illusion is so astonishing that we are sent into a swoon of admiration for the patience of the craftsmen, their almost insane skill and for the wealth of display. On close examination we discover that every scrap of the design has been fretted out and inlaid, each part

fitting the other with hair-space perfection—a work of tremendous labour and expense. The pulpit has heavy curtains of the same green-and-white brocade hanging in rich folds about it. The inlaid design in this case wanders in and out of the folds with never a flaw in the pattern, and hangs over the front with a marble fringe. It really does look like cloth and must be a pleasure to preach from. . . .

Standing at the corners of the crossing, like figures at a windy crossroads, are four statues, and behind them, in revolting splendour, is the high altar, a triumph of marble fretwork with ten spiral columns of *antico verde* marble, under which is an enormous white globe with representations of God the Father and Son sitting upon it. . . . The columns, wriggling their way upwards with thick and violent movements, support a heavy and cumbersome *baldacchino* of beehive shape decorated with fish-scale motives. But what is most extraordinary is that the carpets of the sanctuary and the altar steps are once more made of marble—with inlaid designs of different colours. The side altars are only slightly less elaborate and are equally exhausting. In all cases the applied ornaments have completely overwhelmed the intention of the altar. The architraves and cornices dissolve into a mad riot of angels and cherubs, swags and trophies, and in most cases the cornices themselves cannot keep still but flap about in curves. Under one of the side altars, behind a sheet of glass, is a perfectly realistic painted figure, full size, of the corpse of a saint—so realistic that it is impossible to tell whether it is of wood, wax or flesh—in an attitude of ecstatic death, not laid straight, but collapsed, as though he had struggled up the church and dropped into position ten minutes ago in a ready-prepared sarcophagus fitted up with electric lights.

The ceiling of this church is a disappointment—smothered with white, gold and pale blue ornaments, with very harsh frescoes in the panels. There is a very black Titian *Martyrdom of St. Lawrence*—the most convincing version of that atrocity I have seen so far—and an *Assumption* by Tintoretto over the altar of the left transept, which only asserts itself after we have ceased to marvel at the inlay surrounding it. This church has the most sumptuous interior in Venice and is the most enervating. It is not the best Baroque by any means; in fact, it is rather tasteless—a colossal waste of time, energy and money. When we enter we are surprised, but we leave it in a fit of profound gloom.

*Santa Maria della Salute*

SANTA MARIA DELLA SALUTE is the apotheosis of Venetian Baroque architecture. . . . *Esuberante* is the key word. How beautifully this ornate building sits upon the water of the Grand Canal, how cleverly exploited are all the theatrical possibilities of its position! From ramps of shallow steps, themselves a continuation in stone of the tranquil waves, the building rises like a cluster of triumphal arches placed octagonally, roofed by an enormous dome; and then behind it, over out-jutting chapels, are two smaller domes flanked by bell towers. The whole is arranged in a compact and unified group, as though struggling for space and bubbling upwards. Yet this is a perfectly timed uprising after the quiet, long, horizontal frontage of the Dogana, and forms a triumphant ending to the island, which without it would be a dull wedge of low buildings. In its isolated position it set an interesting problem for its designer, for though the majority of baroque churches (not only in Venice) usually rely entirely on a single façade, the Salute had to be conceived as a complete building in the round. It approaches nearer to true architectural principles and relies less on vertical scenic effects. But even then the result is largely theatrical, for many of the members have no reference to the architectural features of the interior, and by far the majority of the ornaments are employed for their own sakes as decoration only. The great dome, for instance, is not a true dome but is built upon wood acting like a lid upon an octagonal drum, and the enormous voluted consoles do not support anything but are there purely as a decorative transition to the triangular pediments of the lower façades. If they have a function at all it is to give the great statues something to stand on. The lantern of the dome is a fine piece of architectural daring, echoing, as it should, the main dome: and I particularly like the row of obelisks with knobs upon them, taking the place, at that great height, of the statues on the lower volutes. With its rows of gesticulating angels, its brave show of knights in armour and full-bottomed wigs, its bearded prophets in ample wind-blown togas, its rich volutes and swinging curves, it makes a lively and satisfying building. . . . If the cessation of all great plagues had been celebrated with the same freedom and wit as this the world would be a finer place.

The interior of the Salute is strong and robust and more simple

than we expect. It is like entering a theatrical setting for a baroque play, yet a setting not on one stage but on eight. It has many features in common with Palladio's *Teatro Olimpico* at Vicenza as well as with the Pantheon in Rome. There is a bright and airy octagonal floor from which radiate, beyond an arcade of rich clustered columns, a series of chapels. The eye is thus constantly intrigued by entrances, as though we were tempted down a series of avenues. . . . And yet I find it strangely cold and unattractive: it has none of the voluptuousness of St. Mark's. It is always deserted and flooded by cold light. (A church should always be dark like the recesses of the mind, hinting at mysteries.) The Salute is a fine mixture of a theatre, a ballroom and a casino and could fulfil any of these functions. I feel that its real purpose is as a setting for fashionable crowds, and the lingering air of fashionable weddings is its only connection with a church. . . . But we must never judge an empty baroque church too harshly: for when there is some celebration taking place, when the candles twinkle and the air is full of incense and the eyes are regaled by little eddies of bright colour, when the senses are charmed by droning and singing or washed by floods of organ music, that is the time to see the setting take its proper place. Baroque interiors are not to be judged as architecture: they are stage sets, built for permanent use.

Standing on plinths round the gallery of the main octagon are eight statues of the Prophets, which are the worst statues in Venice. They have faces of indeterminate modelling and bodies hung with limp rags, as though the wind had dropped. The wind must always blow in the Baroque, indoors and outdoors. There must always be movement. . . .

### *Santa Maria Zobenigo*

FROM the Salute to a study of the façade of Santa Maria Zobenigo the idea of the secularization of Venetian Baroque churches is almost complete. This façade—so near San Moisè—is not a church front at all but the end of a church on which the monument to the glory of a particular Venetian family has been erected. The glory of God, so obviously fading among a gathering host of latter-day Christians dressed as Romans, has now receded to the interior of the church. His symbolic place on the front of this temple has been taken by statues of the gentlemen who were paying for the building. Wealth

and pride have displaced sanctity, and the Renaissance, which set out to rediscover the greatness of man, has finished by erecting monuments to his vanity. The Baroque is the style of egomania. . . . The niches, of a two-storey façade of Ionic and Corinthian orders, are occupied by members of the Barbaro family standing in pompous attitudes and showing themselves off to the public. They stand on their plinths in the costumes of admirals and generals, as though on their poop decks or in command of their battles, reliving for ever the attitudes of triumph they adopted in real life. Beneath them, in low relief, are decorative maps of their chief battles, of Zara, Crete, Padua, Rome and Spalato, while above are very lively reliefs of their naval battles. Above these the façade begins to break up into characteristic pediments on which loll and prance seven symbolical figures of virtues, white against the sky. By a sculptor's foible, the heads on all these figures are enlarged, in order, so he thought, to correct the height at which they were placed, but they only serve to increase the effect of the general swollen-headedness of the whole façade. The only innocent figure on the building is a cherub above the main doorway, carved upon the keystone. This little fellow, at the time I write, is happily holding a real fern, which has somehow come to grow in his marble hands. . . .

### *Chiesa dei Vecchi*

THE final fall from grace is represented on the front of the Chiesa dei Vecchi. . . . This church, so gloomy that it does not appear in the guide-books, has been allocated, with the honest cynicism reserved for old age alone, to the use of the old men in the adjacent hospital, who, we must presume, are either too weak to protest at the insult or else too far gone to care what further follies human beings will commit. . . . All churches in Venice are near other churches, and this one is near San Zanipolo, the Pantheon of the Doges, so at the corner in splendour sleep the illustrious, while in a narrow alley round the back the old Venetians draw their last breaths. Furthermore, the tombs of the Doges are there for all to see, they are almost as glorious in death as they were in real life, but the Chiesa dei Vecchi is permanently closed (the doors only open for a short while at six in the morning when everybody is asleep) and the aged are thus screened from the eyes of the living.

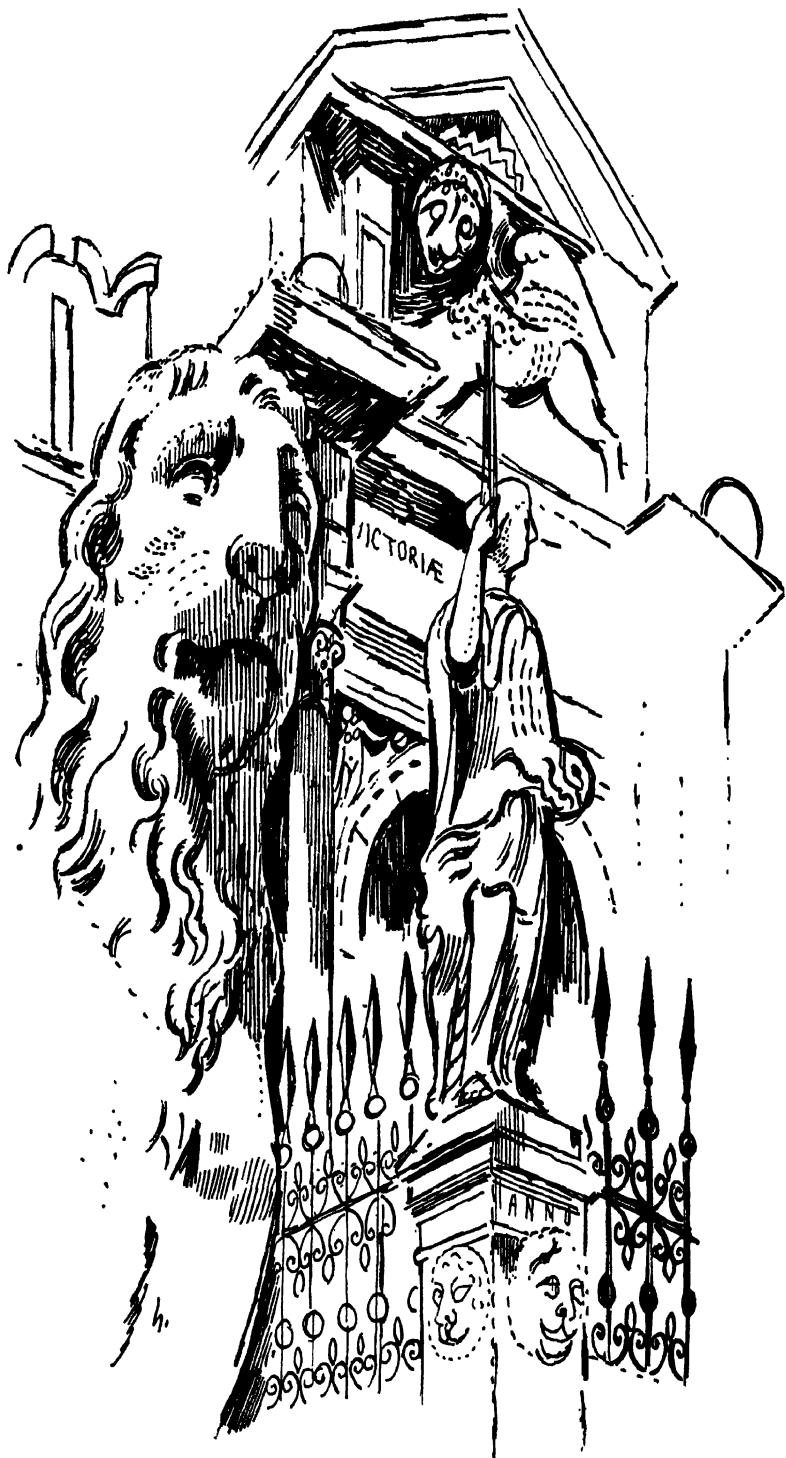
The Chiesa dei Vecchi has the most debased baroque façade in





Venice. Once more a secular front, built, though hardly to the glory, of one Bartelomeus Carnionus—unless he was an avowed cynic who wanted to show his contempt for the Church. The bust of this gentleman stands in an enormous scallop shell above his memorial tablet held up by two slaves, and is the main feature of the front—elevated there like an odd species of shellfish. It surmounts the main order of very debased Ionic pilasters with floreated capitals. The pilasters taper downwards weakly, and on them, in order of appearance along the whole front, are four grotesque heads with faces three feet wide: the first one leering, with flowing moustaches and cunning slanting eyes, the second with the flat face of an old boxer grinding his teeth, the third with a hooked nose and tongue lolling out in defiance, and the fourth with a lively, cynical smile. All of them have *asses' ears*, flowing hair and moustaches. Below each one is the head of a toothless lion, from which are suspended, tied up by ribbons, very heavy swags of fruit. On the level of the bust the order continues up to the cornice, and on each of the four plinths are giant supporting figures. But, as if to mock the age-old burden of the Church (who has tried so hard to lift us from baseness!) these figures, whose task is to support the cornice, are ragged old clerics in capes and cassocks, put to work with skirts girded up to their knees. They lurch painfully over into the narrow street and hold up nothing but a row of heraldic cartouches on a heavy flat cornice. Four figures stand against the sky, dejected, and one of them is in the act of ringing a bell, as though all divine messages had failed and only the death knell was heard. . . .





## Settecento

WITH no diminishing of vitality the art of the Baroque ran parallel to the historical decline of Venice, matching cynicism with failure. Grotesque ornaments sprouted wart-like upon the architecture: heads leered from the keystones of arches, fruit hung limp in swags upon pilasters, the capitals luxuriated like hothouse plants. Columns wriggled or sagged under the great weight of the entablatures, and the great blocks of stern rustication gave way to the characteristic vermiculation—as though wind and worms had combined to eat away the stones. . . . The last truly great episode of Venetian history was the storming of the Parthenon by Francesco Morosini in the campaign of 1687, and from the smoking ruins he brought back as trophies the two marble lions which were set as dumb sentinels outside the gateway of the once-powerful Arsenale. . . . From thenceforward the history of Venice became a dismal series of humiliations and defeats. . . . As symbolical lions will, the Lion of St. Mark settled down upon its haunches to browse in the sun, its teeth gone, its claws blunt, its wings folded back. But the Peacock, whose qualities outlast all calamities save that of actual starvation, suffered no such decline, and strutted about more splendidly than ever amidst the fine buildings and in the glittering interiors. Venice, though no longer a great power, relaxed among the scenes of her past magnificence and went on holiday for a hundred years. . . .

The dawn of the eighteenth century found her full of the enthusiasms of self-love, full of self-satisfaction. For the first time in her history she began to take on the character that we know today—that of hostess. She opened a *salon* for the rest of Europe. With all her accomplishments and with all the wit and fun of which she was capable, she no longer concerned herself with empire building but gave herself up to the sophisticated delights of the drawing-room. . . . The chandeliers sparkled, the harpsichords tinkled, the violins squeaked and out came the packs of cards and the dice boxes. . . . The figures of endless Carnival frolicked in the streets, and upon the water glided the sumptuous, secretive private gondolas and the

magnificently decorated barges in the pageants. The Piazza became a permanent fairground; banquets, balls and parties were held throughout the year, and the gambling houses became the most famous in Europe. Venice arose anew, as a show place, as the most splendid haunt in Europe, and marked the culmination of the Grand Tour. Gaiety and frivolity, hard-headed and clear, completely unhampered by religious doubts, bred a new culture and a new way of life, fostered by a government which saw in it the means of replenishing the fast-emptying coffers. The traditional festivals and water pageants of Venice were encouraged to become great international events, the Carnival was extended from a week to last for months, while the gambling houses received public and official sanction. . . . Venice was early learning the business of catering for tourists on a grand scale. The endless prospects of leisure were before her.

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### *The Veduta Painters*

BY far the greater proportion of wealthy foreign visitors were English. In those days we occupied the position held by Americans today, and though our desires were fundamentally the same, we had the advantage of arriving on the scene at a period of greater taste and enlightenment. The patronage of painting by the old Venetian families having declined, the artists turned to their wealthy visitors for commissions. And, as the main desire of all tourists is to take home views of the places they have visited, both to remind themselves later of their travels and to impress their less fortunate countrymen, as well as to take back their own likenesses made against unfamiliar backgrounds and painted by artists with foreign names, the Venetian Settecento painters developed the new art of view-painting and reduced portraiture to the making of facile likenesses. These activities, though essentially superior, can be correctly termed the dignified forerunners of the picture-postcard views and the seaside photographic portraits. The aim of this work was never very high. Its main interest was verisimilitude, which depended on the skill of the particular artist as a colourist and master of perspective to produce a result which would be recognizable to everybody and which would conjure up, at a later date, the right feelings of nostalgia and admiration. It quickly developed into an

industry of international proportions, but no Venetian artist of those times could have foreseen the great mechanical industry of today, nor the hosts of tourists who, though they have no pretensions as artists, can make their own little pictures by the mere click of a lever. Nor would they care to own that odd group of artists who produce the debased view-paintings of today, even less those troglodytes who haunt the Piazza making their sinister nocturnal caricatures in the glare of electric light and to the din of jazz bands. . . . It is significant, however, that even at that early date there was a desire for some mechanical device to eliminate the sheer drudgery of perspective drawing. . . . There are hints and rumours of the use of the *camera obscura* to help with the initial drawing, and though few of the view-painters have openly admitted using it, we can visualize something like a mysterious Punch and Judy booth into which the artist disappeared for a few hours to trace upon his board the "view" reflected by mirrors through a small aperture. (No one who has ever been inside a *camera obscura* can resist its charm—there is still one at work in the Castlehill in Edinburgh—and it would be an obvious temptation for an artist whose pre-occupation was with verisimilitude to make a sly tracing and colour it up afterwards.) This particular activity, which has for ever made serious artists conscience-stricken, must not be exaggerated, for the view-pictures of the period always remained superior to mechanical copying. They make a most attractive series, which, though seldom important works of art, often have much intrinsic value, and now are of great topographical interest. Some of our most precise views of eighteenth-century cities, not only of Venice, are the direct result of the desires of tourists to take home pictures of their travels, and, as in the case of Canaletto's views of London, show evidence of the remarkable pride that the eighteenth-century patron had in the architectural transformations of the period. In a sense it was a minor renaissance, an essentially healthy art, and we can only praise the taste of men (Englishmen too!) who had the confidence and enlightenment to commission what was at the time the very latest art. . . . However much we may suspect the motives of Joseph Smith as an art dealer—Walpole called him the "Merchant of Venice"—we are now profoundly thankful that he devoted forty years of his life to encouraging Canaletto. That he made a handsome profit from the sale of his collection to George III is of secondary importance compared to the wealth of interest now vested in the Royal

Collections at Windsor. Likewise, on many a gloomy winter's day in London, it is with nothing but joy that we can look at Canaletto's views of Venice in the Wallace Collection and the National Gallery, even if our motives are merely nostalgic. We are enjoying now, in our public galleries, the fruits of eighteenth-century tourism. . . . Canaletto's views are still the most convincing records of the city, beside which even the best modern photographs pale into insignificance. Other artists, notably Guardi and Turner, have created more important pictures of Venice, but Canaletto best preserves the outer reality. It is therefore not entirely surprising to find that scarcely any paintings by Canaletto remain in Venice at the present day, as most of them are in England. . . . But I have noticed that there seems to be an antipathy among Venetians for Canaletto: they say, quite rightly, that he is only a master of perspective and that Guardi is the better painter. With this I agree, but I always suspect a note of sour grapes in these remarks because *we* and not they have his paintings. . . . It would not be unfair to say that the present-day tourist attractions of Venice would be greatly enhanced if their Canalettos were returned to them. . . . But at least they have the real Venice, and after all we paid for the paintings two hundred years ago. . . .

### *Rosalba*

I DO not consider Rosalba Carriera to have been the greatest portrait painter of this time, but she was such a phenomenon of the eighteenth-century drawing-room movement that she deserves special mention. She was one of those fantastic personalities for which Venice has always been famous. She was the archetype of the artist suffragette, and in no time at all, possibly because it was unusual for a woman to become a successful professional artist, she became the rage of the *salons* of Europe, numbering among her friends the greatest men in the countries she visited. In her lifetime she enjoyed the reputation that some of the greatest painters have only had after they were dead. She travelled about, with her box of pastels and trunks of dresses, in a state rivalled only by visiting princesses. It is difficult for us, when looking at her pretty pastel portraits today in Venice—portraits which look as though they were done with face powder, rouge and blue eye-shadow—to understand why she had such a reputation. But Rosalba's portraits somehow



preserve for us the quality of the boudoir, with its idle wigs, yards of lace, tinsel-threaded brocades and silver slippers: that soft streak of effeminacy that lurked in so much eighteenth-century art. They are pictures from the powder bowl . . . ephemeral, and yet, we feel, perfect likenesses, perfect holiday portraits.

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### *Vignettes : One*

NO century lends itself to the treatment of the *vignette* quite as well as the eighteenth (ours is the century of the newsreel, the documentary film, the still photograph), and from now on the moods of Venice present themselves as a series of charming pictures softened at the edges. There is a long series of glimpses of Venetian life, nearly all of a minor kind, which, piece by piece, build up into an album—a scrapbook of pleasure and entertainment, a scrapbook never completed, through which we can browse, half understanding some of the scenes because they happened so long ago, and understanding others better than they were understood at the time because we see them at a distance. . . . Yet, like pictures of an oddly magical kind, they are never quite what they seem, and beneath the beauty of the surface there lies a sinister background. . . . The glitter of sophistication and the liveliness of comedy cover the ache of romanticism and the fear of nihilism. . . . Death comes to the Carnival, but he is never vulgar enough to declare himself. . . . Not for nothing did the Venetians take to wearing masks and clouding their heads in veils of black lace. . . . He came to Venice in the most attractive forms: at first quite unnoticed in the hilarious riots of the streets: later he was shrouded in the Venetian silver fog, and finally was blown away over the sea. . . . The scenes are all silent now: there is no movement in pictures: they are flashes of ribaldry, pleasure, splendour and then, later, they express a longing to escape. . . .

THERE is a room in the Querini-Stampalia Gallery which is lined from floor to ceiling with some sixty or more panel paintings by Gabriele Bella, which, in their slightly amateurish fashion, give us as vivid an idea of the early eighteenth century as Canaletto and

Guardi did of a later period. As paintings they are negligible but as documents invaluable. They are arranged in no particular order. We can wander as we would round the city, aimlessly, like visitors. . . .

THERE is a scene of violence. . . . The rival factions of citizens, the Castellani and the Nicolotti, are having one of their periodical rowdy meetings upon the bridge of San Fosca. The mobs of young men are in all respects alike in dress; they are lurching forward upon each other, pressing up the bridge with clenched fists and sticks. They are, it seems, queuing up to be knocked off, for the water of the canal under the bridge is full of bobbing heads and floating caps. . . . Groups of respectable citizens, the men bewigged, the ladies masked, are standing upon platforms arranged on barges, or else are viewing the scene from the safety of their balconies. One gentleman, in his finery and brass buttons, has drawn his sword to enter the brawl, but is restrained by a pikeman and others.

IN 1740 when the King of Polonia came to Venice he was entertained by the citizens in the Piazza with a great display of bull-baiting. About ten bulls, tethered by long reins from their horns, are lumbering about the ring in frustration and fury, goaded and tormented by young men. The gentry are looking on from the safe side of the fence, the ladies from their carpeted window ledges.

IN the courtyard of the Palazzo Ducale (where we now have such respectable orchestral concerts) another scene of bull-baiting is taking place, this time with dogs, around the two bronze well-heads. . . .

ANOTHER bull-baiting scene of great excitement on the Rialto Bridge. . . . Teams of masked men are leading the tethered bulls, while men with wheelbarrows are attempting to pass them and run over the bridge. Upon the steps of the bridge two men are being tossed. . . . How terrifying to run up the steps to be met by the bulls coming over the other side. . . . Crowds are standing by.

IN the Campo Sant' Angelo is a bear-baiting scene which looks rather pathetic. Many fierce hounds and men with sticks are tormenting the unfortunate creature. . . .

TO the Merceria, looking towards the Tower of the Giants, with a glimpse of the Piazza beyond. . . . In this narrow street, where today are the smart shops, the money-changers, the procurers, a great riot takes place between bravos. Arms are flying in all directions. One poor man lies on the ground, knocked out.

VERY near to brawling is the scene of the *Ball Game* in the Campo alli Gesuiti. The crowds of spectators gather at either end of the *campo*, one group far away in the distance, with the Murano Lagoon over their heads. It is a confusing game: there are nine players in white shirts and blue trousers, and four balls, if not more. One player seems to be standing on a marked piece of ground in an attitude of hurling the ball down the *campo* to six players who stand on either side, waiting. . . . There must be some excitement, for in the nearest crowd of spectators violent quarrels have broken out. People are being upset from their chairs and belaboured; some are running away; dogs are jumping and barking. . . . The church of I Gesuiti, by the way, at this date had a simple façade—the fat columns, the breezy evangelists, the figures on the top cornice which we know today, were yet to be revealed. . . .

THERE is great interest in a picture called *Festival with a Bull Hunt, the Killing of a Cat with the Shaved Head, the Seizing of the Duck and the Goose, etc.*, in which these unfortunate animals and birds are seen once more amusing the crowds. The scene is set in the Campo Santa Maria Formosa. In the background is the bull hunt—a skirmishing among the young bloods. Not far from it two ducks are hanging from the top of a greasy pole and two youths are trying to reach them. In the centre of the *campo* on a raised platform are musicians, and dancers of both sexes, gaily doing a jig and doubtless singing. On the left on a smaller raised platform takes place the Murder of the Cat. The cat seems to be strapped round its middle

to an upright board, leaving its legs and head free to scratch and bite. It is a large and vicious tom, and it is in the act of violently scratching the lunging shaven head of a man. Two attendants in turbans, holding spears, give this weird scene an oriental flavour, and I feel that something horrible happened as usually does at the murder of a cat. . . . Along the bridge in the foreground run three almost naked youths. Above the bridge, but almost out of reach, is hung a goose, presumably alive for the purpose, on a rope which seems to be controlled by the ladies watching on their balconies. The young men run up the bridge, leap into the air and attempt to seize the moving head of the goose. . . . One youth, who has lost his loincloth, is naked in mid-air. . . . But they always fall into the water, where they are swimming among the idling gondolas.

FROM these minor popular feasts, of which there are others taking place, let us go to the Piazzetta to see the performance of acrobats on a grand scale . . . on the day of the *Feast in the Piazzetta di San Marco on Maundy Thursday*. Halfway down the Piazzetta is a three-tiered baroque pavilion in blue, white and gold, gaily hung with garlands. In front of this, in a space left by the crowds, is a huge and impressive pyramid of acrobats six times the height of a man. Above them, down a rope stretching from the top of the Campanile to the Palazzo Ducale, a man is being shot with a bunch of flowers in his hand. These incidents are obviously part of the longer programme for which great preparations have been made. . . . Tier upon tier of people sit in the arches of the Palace, while in the centre the Doge and dignitaries in red preside under a striped awning. People also sit in tiers by the Basilica, the Library and the Loggetta. In the foreground is an animated throng, among whom are men selling comfits and souvenirs.

ANOTHER painting shows *A Scene which can be Observed Every day in the Piazzetta where the People of All Nations Gather Mornings and Evenings*. . . . Large booths are erected near the Palazzo Ducale, down the centre of the Piazzetta and in between the Columns by the waterfront. The scene is like a fairground. . . . There is a show of freak animals, acrobats and strong men blowing trumpets. Two Punch

and Judy shows are in progress, and a gay scene of the *Commedia dell' Arte*. There is a fruit-stall, and a fat lady on a trestle. Under the arches of the Palazzo Ducale a doctor sells physic to the musical accompaniment of two enormously fat singers and a guitarist in black. There is a terrible scene of tooth-pulling in a mocking crowd of figures, among whom are Pulcinello and Harlequin. . . . Elsewhere two boys are fighting; groups are talking and gesticulating. Some people are wearing masks. It is a somewhat wild and riotous scene, but very rumbustious.

THE Piazza did not remain free of temporary erections for very long at a time. In the *Design of the Old Fair of the Sensa in Venice* it seems as though the entire space was given over to a ramshackle double row of booths for the sale of practically everything. There are picture shops, furniture shops, clothes shops, jewellers', metal workers' and tobacconists' shops. There are men smoking long clay pipes; one man smoking a pipe six feet long. It is informal and untidy, the age-old type of bazaar. But in the next picture, called *The New Plan of the Fair of the Sensa*, there had evidently been complaints on æsthetic grounds, and the setting has become architect-designed: the booths are arranged in the form of an enormous oval, with colonnades for use on rainy days, and rows of statues on the parapets. It is all painted white and looks very fine indeed. In and out of the colonnades the masked ladies move, covered with black-hooded capes and wearing *tricorne* hats. . . . There were many solemn religious processions in the Piazza, as on the Day of Corpus Domini, when the Doge, accompanied by councillors and clergy, went in procession with statues, relics and candles under a tunnel specially built round the square; or, as on the Night of Good Friday, when there was a procession of the Host under a black canopy, when everyone was dressed in black and walked with candles dipped. . . . Above was the moon, with two candles sparkling in every window of the surrounding buildings. . . . And again, on Palm Sunday, when the Doge and Clergy were present at the release of doves in front of St. Mark's. . . .

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BUT it was during the days of the Carnival that the most fantastic scenes took place. In the picture called the *Masquerade on the Last*

*Day of the Carnival* the Piazza San Marco is in a different guise. Here nothing is serious, all is make-believe and frivolity. Like most true carnival, it is a caricature of life, sinister and disturbing as well as amusing. The dividing line between the macabre and laughter has become very fine. The figures seem to move on the verge of the unreal, as though the trivialities of life were the mask to a deeper reality that had its roots in unsavoury things.

The Piazza is full of people who mock themselves in fancy dress: dress stylized yet again into the bird motif, but not the bright birds we saw in the works of Carpaccio, but now into fat birds, overfed, avaricious. The costumes of the ladies transform them into stately drifting pyramids of lace, black cloaks and trailing skirts. They flick fans before their faces, but their faces are masked, and on their heads they wear the neat, small cockaded *tricorne*. The men, in voluminous black cloaks wrapped high about the neck and white stockings on their legs, are like crows and magpies. They too wear masks, though this time with the noses protruding like beaks, and on their heads large black *tricorne* hats with sweeping lines, trimmed upon their edges with flickering white feathers. . . . All identity is hidden behind the masks: only the voice could have been revealing, or some special sign between lovers. Indiscretion is made easy, intrigue fostered by secrecy: privacy is preserved more for the opportunity of licence than for modesty. . . . All is false and obscure, nothing is clear, all things are opposite. . . . Even Death, the one haunting truth that nobody could deny, is derided . . . for across the centre of the crowd moves a mock funeral procession. A black coffin is carried by six pall-bearers, with eight others holding prayer books. They are dressed as priests in black but with vermilion cockaded hats upon their heads and black masks upon their faces. In front of them, standing together, are two figures in grey gowns, white wigs and tall black hats, but with enormous grotesque heads and identical masks of huge dwarf faces. In this world of opposites dwarfs have become bigger than life-size, hideous. . . . Behind the coffin follows a mob of capering mourners, dressed as figures from the *Commedia dell' Arte*. Harlequin, the gay tatterdemalion, full of wit and unseemly noises, dances with Brighella, the rogue and assassin. . . . Near them is a woman with a tall conical hat with a red bow on top and circular face-mask. . . . The figure of Pulcinello, the sly epicurean, with his exaggerated stomach, his hump, his row of bells down back and front of his red-and-white striped jacket, black beaked



mask, immensely tall hat, waves a bladder over the crowd, followed by seven jeering boys. In other parts of the Piazza he appears again, like a figure of magic in many places at once—here he dangles a vermilion whip and bells; there he holds a huge sausage on a fork; elsewhere he pushes a wheelbarrow with the figure of the Doctor in it—the sensualist and the gas-bag together. . . . The Piazza is crowded and other incidents occur in a mad riot of fun and caricature: behind everyone rise the familiar buildings, the Clock Tower, the red Standards, the Basilica and the Campanile, just as they are today. . . .

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LET us leave the Piazza, only hinting at the many shows that continued the whole year round, at *festa* after *festa*, as well as at the official ceremonies and processions of an ecclesiastical and civic nature, with their displays of jewelled copes and mitres, canopies, censers, candles, banners, statues and processional ornaments; the Doge's public appearances in ermine, red and gold, with the members of the Councils and other state dignitaries; the parades of soldiers with muskets, cockades, fifes, drums and flags; the parades of sailors and boatmen, and the constant stream of foreign visitors—kings and princes and their retinues. . . . Indoors the events of the season were equally splendid. . . . There were brilliant spectacles and performances at the theatres—La Fenice, Goldoni, Malibran and others. One picture here has the title of *View of the Magnificent Apparatus and Illuminations of the Theatre of San Samuele, entirely decorated with Mirrors, Bas-Reliefs, and Transparent Scenes of Crystal*. . . . But the central attraction of the season was the Ridotto, the public gambling house. One picture, called a *Saloon of the New Ridotto*, shows the interior of a baroque palace, a hall of marble, with Corinthian columns, gilded mirrors, balustraded cornice and a frescoed ceiling hung with lighted chandeliers. The floor is crowded by men and women in masked costume as before, but it is apparently cold, for the ladies have discarded their fans for muffs—and some of the men too have muffs. Among them stroll a few figures of carnival—Pulcinello is here again but wearing a false face with long, drooping beak, and one or two wenches dressed as peasants. One holds a distaff of unspun wool, the other a basket with contents covered with a cloth—certainly not eggs in this throng, unless they are eggs of gold. Two Negro servants await their master in the crowd. Their



eyes flash in their cocoa faces; their liveries are moss green with gold edges; they have pink *jabeaux*, vermilion hats with ribbons hanging down the back and pheasants' feathers sticking up at the front. Around the room on all sides are tables behind which sit sober-looking men, without masks, in black clothes, white lace and full-bottomed wigs, counting out heaps of gold and silver coin in the candlelight on the presentation of slips. Behind, in a niche, people retire to sit and take hot drinks served from a silver jug by a red-coated attendant. On shelves behind him are rows of bottles and jars, of drinks and sweetmeats, trimmed with flags. At the back of the rooms are two doors, through which black figures are coming and going in a mysterious darkness. . . . Though animated, the crowd is orderly: people drift and move about over the dark red carpet. Everything is under control, but all the players are masked: there is no music, though there would be the quiet tinkle of coins. As though money is the only open thing in life, the money-changers are the only people unmasked. . . .

ANOTHER interior, another game. . . . This time a game of indoor tennis, *The Racquet Game*. In a wide hall with large windows a game is in progress. A net is stretched between two balustrades. The floor is tiled in neat squares. There are boxes for balls at the sides. Four players, two on either side, are dressed in white with yellow caps and they play with small red racquets. The ball is a pretty one, of blue and red segments. . . . The spectators, who are unmasked, appear to be ordinary folk, though some are gentlemen. The whole atmosphere is more normal: the healthy atmosphere of all sporting rings. . . . A boy retrieves a blue and red ball from one of the window-sills. He has climbed a ladder placed against the sloping ledge which goes all round the hall above the spectators. Balls apparently shoot to the sills as much as to the scoring marks on the end walls. . . . *The Racquet Game* is distinctly restful. . . .

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So far we have wandered about the streets, squares and buildings, but the festivities of Venice took place as much on water as on land. . . . In a picture called *Ladies' Regatta on the Grand Canal* we see the unusual spectacle of women rowing boats in a race. These hefty maidens—and skilful too, for it is extremely difficult to use the

## THE LION AND THE PEACOCK

Venetian oar in the standing position—with their dresses and hair blowing in the wind, are starting off from the Dogana, followed by boatloads of men in barges decorated with plumes and sprays of leaves. There are crowds of people on the quayside of the Dogana and Salute, and on the right a mass of highly decorated boats with baroque carving in silver, gold and red, from which the spectators cheer the race. . . .

*Noblemen Fishing in the Canal Orfano* shows two boatloads of noblemen in a circle *watching* fishermen at work on the Canal Orfano. Behind are frigates with sails unfurled. . . . I suspect that this is another occasion for a wager.

THEN there are two crowded scenes of the Doge going out in the *Bucintoro* for his annual espousal with the Adriatic, a scene of great splendour and movement, the elaborately gilded barge, flying the Standards of the Republic, slowly drifting among a moving mass of gondolas trimmed for the occasion. . . .

One other painting shows the wedding party of a noblewoman arriving at Santa Maria della Salute. The great domed church—its volutes painted not half big enough—rises behind the scene. At the top of the steps a smart row of clergy and relatives, all soberly dressed in black and white, awaits the bride. Fanning out on either side are rows of soldiers in blue, holding decorated spears. . . . The bride, dressed in white with a long train, steps out of her gondola. Her father in full-bottomed wig and blue coat takes her on his right arm, and four great-bosomed ladies in sober black with white lace caps wait to join the procession up the steps. . . . The canal is full of gondolas, arriving, perhaps a little late, for the wedding. . . . Boys are running about the quayside behind the small crowd which has collected on either side, among whom appear to be a few disappointed suitors. . . .

FINALLY let us leave these scenes of summer and good weather, and look at the scene on the northern lagoon on the fifteenth of January, 1708. The sea is frozen over; there is solid ice between the

*Fondamente Nuove* and Murano, and the citizens are taking full advantage of it. The day is gloomy; a lowering sky, a cold yellow light everywhere; snow upon the quayside and upon the roof-tops. People stand muffled in cloaks with just their faces peeping out. . . . But on the ice there is a lively scene: people are sliding and skating, their clothes flying in all directions, their arms in the air. This is Italian skating, with gesticulation—gestures of freedom and pleasure, gestures of despair when they have fallen, gestures as suited for the opera and ballet as for the ice. People are falling on their faces, on their bottoms; one woman is being pushed along in a *wheeled* sledge; another is using a small boat for the same purpose. Some are even wearing their masks while they skate. . . . Two monks are trying themselves out on the ice, and both have come to grief. . . . To the right is a Venice I have not seen—Venice under snow. Grey and cold it looks, with the bell towers rising above the blanketed roofs. In the background is what might be the Island of San Francesco Deserto, and farther, on the mainland, the faint white hills. Venice fades away in the haze of a winter afternoon. . . .

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### *Giambattista Tiepolo*

THE central problem of Giambattista Tiepolo is that he was a serious artist who lived in an age of brilliant trivialities. Essentially profound, we find him constantly struggling to leave the seductive emotional life of the lower salons of Venetian palaces to escape into the quietness of the attics of his own mind. But he is constantly waylaid upon the stairs by bands of revellers and sentimentalists who insist on intriguing him with stories of love and feminine beauty, until, even on those occasions when he manages to free himself, he finds that his thoughts are influenced by the charms of the life below him. . . . And yet, he remains the greatest painter of eighteenth-century Venice, a genius among competent artists, and occupies the unique historical position of being the last of the old masters and the first of the new. In a last out-pouring of astonishing vitality and technical skill, he summed up the ideas and knowledge of the previous two centuries, and, when working in Spain, he influenced Goya, who in his turn influenced the French painters of the nineteenth century. He was the last artist to work in the unbroken tradition of Venetian

painting, a tradition which, by retaining its individuality to the end, passed on the conceptions of the Renaissance to the modern world.

Still, his work leaves me with a sense of loss for I feel it somehow fails. He was an artist of first rank, a wonderful draughtsman, as accomplished a painter if ever there was one, fearless of size and space, exuberant, fertile, altogether brilliant, and, although it is absurd to wish an artist born into another age, I feel that had he been contemporary with Tintoretto there would have been serious rivalry between the two. Yet no artist can live apart from his age: that was his greatest misfortune.

In spite of the many passages of unusual beauty in his work, I find it unpleasant on the whole—a curious mixture of flippancy, sexuality, melodrama and real feeling. His mind hovered between opposites as best it might at a time when all values had a double meaning. . . . The Way of the Cross had become over-furnished in the style of a Roman melodrama, while outside the Church the theme was more frankly pagan. The new palaces with their furniture and ornaments, the pictures on the walls, and the ceiling paintings have a predominantly classical theme; the old gods disported themselves in a polite bacchanal, and all rooms sooner or later led into bedrooms—to the cornucopia, the cherub and the bedlike cloud. In the weird life of the streets frolicked Pulcinello and his crew—the Venetian Bacchus, tipsy, mocking, satirical—little animals of pleasure broken loose from the drawing-rooms. People hid themselves away behind protective masks—so curiously vivid a manifestation of over-indulgence, so lascivious, purposely ugly. . . . Yet it was a symbolical face, materialized in the form of painted cloth to cover human weakness. These masks so like the bleached skulls of birds—with warts and black spots upon them—were a kind of declaration of sensuality, under which the real person hid away from the exhaustion and futility of the age. Behind it was melancholy and tiredness and vacuity. . . . This was the background against which Tiepolo worked, these were the themes of his art.

The paintings in Sant' Alvise, *The Coronation with Thorns*, *The Flagellation* and *The Road to Calvary*, are among his most serious works. For once the flippant, the haughty and the merely beautiful are absent. They certainly express pain and suffering, but it is the slightly melodramatic suffering of an eighteenth-century Christ arisen from the baroque welter of Venetian life, not quite real, with an element of self-pity and an enjoyment of tears. Feelings seem

over-indulged, for their own sakes, existing apart from the tragedy. . . . *The Road to Calvary* is a huge painting of unusual melancholy. There is a great wintry crag on which grow leafless trees—Tiepolo's symbols of despair. In the background is a coldly classical temple against a snowy range of alps. Christ stumbles under the weight of the Cross, and above him is the procession of soldiers, men and horses, with turbans, helmets, trumpets and banners, moving heavily up to the summit of the crag, where the crosses have already been prepared for the Thieves. . . .

In his final phase in Madrid, after years of brilliant mural painting, as though homesick, he made a few nostalgic pictures of imaginary Venetian street scenes with *pagliacci* and charlatans moving among crowds. Then as if he were privately concerned only with idle and melancholy daydreams, he produced a series of etchings in which he emptied himself of the whole jumble of the artistic properties of his age. . . . They are all like stabs of pain—Pan leering between ragged figures, a kind of bacchic-shepherd; men burning human heads and skulls; snakes among the faggots of an altar; dogs scratching; owls perching everywhere on leafless trees. . . . Meaningless groups of soldiers, orientals, horses, skeletons, animals; shields, plinths, trumpets, rags, skulls, drums, bones and hour-glasses. . . . Groups of ragged shepherds and *pagliacci* among fir trees. . . . Finally, the sad appearance of a Bimbo in the arms of an old man.

These etchings—which preceded Goya's *Caprichos*—so far removed in spirit from the haughty self-confidence of his grandiose ceiling decorations, had come to be Tiepolo's private criticism of his own age. The mask was torn off, and it revealed nothing but a collection of meaningless images left over from three hundred years of Renaissance art. . . .

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### *Vignettes : Two*

APART from Giambattista Tiepolo, who indulged in his own romanticism in the grand manner, the lesser artists continued in their own way. . . . They left the bright, sunlit views of the real Venice and, stage by stage, withdrew into their private dreams. Moods of sadness led to despair, disgust to nostalgia, dissatisfaction to hysteria, and then, as the moods dispelled themselves, there was

an escape into imaginary pastorals and the intellectual safety of archaeology. . . . Let us look at pictures again, in the Accademia, one by one. . . .

FIRST, here is the one Canaletto in Venice which can be safely attributed to him, the painting of the loggia of a palace, a scene such as might have been found anywhere at the time. It is an unromanticized and honest representation of the scene. Reason and firmness play over everything; it is a work of normal vision unhampered by the imagination. It is a kind of very fine journalism, a recording of appearances tastefully handled.

But the strident atmosphere, the heat, the smells and the slumminess seem eventually to eat away the reasonableness. There is the stirring of another theme: the picture shimmers, the scene moves slightly as though seen through hot water running down glass. In Francesco Guardi's *The Island of San Giorgio* there are the identical lagoons, boats and buildings as in Canaletto, but they are distorted. The tower of San Giorgio Maggiore is twice its real height; the church buildings move, lean slightly inwards; the dome sinks, is an insignificant depressed bubble; the houses of the Giudecca merge into an indistinguishable mass. The sky is torrid as though in a threatening storm, the lighting is that of a sultry, weird evening, foreboding, picking out the sparkling shirts of the gondoliers, the limp, hanging sails, the rags draped over the boats. The figures move lazily, shifting heavy weights. The heat saps everything, holds everything down. . . .

Where Canaletto's technique was sure and calligraphic, Guardi's was nervous and loose, as though his brush hovered and stabbed. Where Canaletto is safe and pleasant, confirming the common vision, Guardi painted the uncommon, the flavour of a Venice that existed only once, at his own time, and was gone. He painted Venice in rags: in its decay, in its attenuation. . . .

His *View of an Island* might be anywhere between here and Torcello. . . . Once more there is the gloom that precedes an electric storm. A church upon an island; people upon the banks spreading out washing to dry. A distant view of the towers of Venice on the horizon, obscured in warm haze. Across the foreground a hooded gondola glides smoothly. . . . Who is under the black hood? Where are they going? So tired, so pointless. . . . The awful ennui of the lagoons, dark, threatening, inescapable. . . .

FROM Guardi the mood changes but continues surely upon its way: Michele Marieschi painted work as reasonable—if not of quite the same quality—as Canaletto, but in the two pictures in this gallery, *Fantastic View with an Obelisk* and *Fantastic View with a Bridge*, he establishes the process of breaking away from reality and enters the realm of the imagination. Guardi regards the outer Venice romantically, while in these paintings Marieschi desires the oblivion of Venice. . . . In the *View with an Obelisk* there is a scene reminiscent of the Molo, with a building on the right disturbingly like the ruins of the Palazzo Ducale. The Gothic arches, hung with the faded, colourless garlands of a past carnival, sprout weeds; rickety scaffolding stands at the corner as though in a belated attempt to mend something beyond repair. A staircase of white marble meanders up from the Molo to some classical building behind, a memory of Sansovino. Facing the sea is an empty open-air pulpit, and then, upon the pavement, the great obelisk, with weeds growing round it. The figures in this picture are surely Venetians in fancy dress, though this is not a masque but the fancy dress of a normal day in the imagination. A gentleman in a vermilion costume—which in real life would be black—leads a lady in a blue crinoline down the staircase. She is followed by her Negro page in white wig and gold brocaded coat. . . . On the quayside are fantasy Venetians in colourful rags, in turbans with feathers, black cloaks, carrying swords and wands. The two men in the foreground are feathered like bantam cocks: what appears to be a crouching beggar turns out to be a heap of rubbish or abandoned merchandise. . . . From this scene of melancholy a gondola glides away over a clear blue sea to a sparkling rustic island in the background, an island of escape where there are water-wheels, cottages, vineyards, a monastery on a hill.

In Marieschi's *View with a Bridge* we are in a landscape of classical ruins which seem at first glance to give no hint of the buildings of Venice. But in a moment we realize that the bridge must be a ruin of the Rialto, for there are gondolas and barks moving along the canal. The city has disappeared, and the Rialtine Islands are bare again, like Torcello. There is the desire to escape, but still the haunting memory of familiar places remains, as does the feeling of isolation.

NOW the nightmare takes over, but in the form of a religious vision—if it is religious, for all these things are hinted at, are obscure.

Sebastiano Ricco has a picture called *Nocturnal Apparition* which now dissolves all reality in nonsense. It shows an event of a supernatural character taking place in an actual room, yet a room full of sleeping figures, so that it must be a dream. They mix with each other: reality, unreality, apparition and sleep. All sense of time and all sense of place are lost in this haunting picture; yet where can it be but in a Venetian palace? . . . In a room with red walls and floor—the colour of blood behind the eyes—in a bed with a huge green velvet *baldacchino* sleep two old men under tumbled brown sheets. Two servants in ragged cloaks sleep at the foot of the bed. The room has heavy gilt furniture, an urn of bronze, wall brackets and, gazing out of sightless eyes, grey classical busts of heroes. At the doorway, leaning up against the post, is another servant, asleep while standing, armed with a sword. But this dream-watcher, guardian of this overheated chamber, is powerless against the apparition, for across the room, in a cloud of smoke, flies the figure of an old man, his beard flowing, his head garlanded, holding in his hand a wand. . . .

THUS the cycle is complete, from youth to old age, from Giorgione to the Settecento Romantics, and yet there is no stopping, time goes on. . . . There must be a reaction even from nightmare, and here in Venice fun and optimism cannot be banished for very long. The gloom of the earlier Romanticism changes, clearing like a summer storm. . . . With Francesco Zuccarelli the sun shines again. His scenes take place in calm valleys, near smooth rivers, where, on the mossy banks, goats nibble the heads off flowers, swans glide in the backwaters among the rushes, and fishermen sit calmly by small waterfalls in sparkling streams coming down from the foothills, in that most lovely early evening light. The Alps are in the distance, far away, a delicate blue; in the middle distance is a Lombardy town, its towers and turrets catching the evening sun. The trees are oaks and poplars and umbrella pines—cool greens and ambers feathered against the pink and azure. . . .

His pastoral scenes are very choice works of their kind, not overstated though sweet. All slums are banished, as are all harshness and ugliness, all the artificiality of towns. And yet these paintings are themselves artificial. . . . His treatment of classical subjects is delicately absurd. . . . Here is a bacchanal, but not the gutteral Roman bac-



chanal, rather a scene politely naughty, intended to please the ladies in the drawing-room. . . . The setting is pastoral—early evening again, with frolics outside the cowshed at sundown. An obese Bacchus sprawls naked upon a white sheet propped against an empty wine jar. He is trimmed with vines, and a tendril gently trails across his paunch. Around him maidens with tambourine and thyrsus frolic with vine-decorated fauns. On the grass in front of them three maidens with girt-up draperies are weaving in and out the arms of two sunburnt fauns. In the distance one maiden chases another into a circular temple in a bosky. . . . It is all rather gay and ineffectual.

In another painting called *Bull Baiting* we see the delights of the sport in a romantic setting. On a late afternoon the people have come down to the meadows by the river. Two white bulls are tethered by the horns and held by young people. Youths and maidens set their hounds upon the bulls, and naked children run around them. One child is on all fours pretending to be a bull. . . . Grown-ups stand grouped in the shade of the trees, or lounge on vermilion draperies. . . . Once more the tambourines, the girded skirts, the hint of afternoon in a latter-day Arcady, with Italian towns in the background, and beyond, the Alps.

THE paintings of Giuseppe Zais, though romantic, return us to the scenes of classical ruins as they must have appeared before the excavations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. And yet they are imaginary. They conjure up the flavour of old Rome, they might be scenes on the Tiber, or of the Baths of Caracalla—one painting here is almost an amalgamation of the Arch of Titus and the columns and plinths of the Roman Forum with the House of Caligula above. They seem to do for Rome what Marieschi prophesied for Venice, though the latter has not yet come to pass.

LASTLY, there is a group of painters who represent another phase of the movement, Visentini, Jolli, Moretti, Gaspari, Battaglioli. . . . They painted architectural fantasies—pure *tours-de-force* in perspective and stage-lighting, based on a dry academic study of classical architecture. Their paintings are dull, though correct, and must

have had a high place in the cold hearts of the *dilettanti*. Once more they dreamed of Venice, but of the obliteration of the Gothic and Early Renaissance and the substitution of pseudo-Classical buildings. In a picture by Moretti, Sansovino's Library is retained, but he builds a horrid Roman bath where the Palazzo Ducale stands. . . . All this work is rather futile: it is an exercise in a learning which had no creative outlet, though in their detached way it represents the cooler flights of eighteenth-century fancy. The nineteenth century feels not very far away, and the latter-day host of antique dealers and fakers. . . .

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### *Interiors*

THE foregoing moods of Romanticism, which represent the dissolution, decline and recovery of eighteenth-century artistic thought, had no historical sequence, except in the broadest sense, but were part of the general turmoil of the disintegration of the artistic ideas that started at the Renaissance. They occurred simultaneously, like eddies in a swollen stream. The lives of the artists overlapped, they worked together and influenced each other, gradually working out the artistic progress of the century. Behind them, but still of them, was the genius of the Tiepolo family, who seemed the only major artists to be trusted to carry on the great traditions and to hand on the most important ideas to posterity. With the development of tourism and the shift in patronage, artists broke loose from Venice and spread their influences far and wide throughout Europe. Canaletto, Ricci, Pellegrini, Zucarelli all worked in England; Rosalba went upon her triumphant tour; the Tiepolo father and son did important work in Würzburg and other places, and Giambattista died in Madrid. . . . But at home, side by side with all this, went the small domestic art of the Longhi, the work of the theatrical designers and mural decorators, and the host of artists working in the furnishing and ornamental crafts—the cabinet-makers, the carvers, textile and tapestry workers, the potters, metal workers, jewellers and craftsmen in glass. . . . It was a lively age, and in these minor crafts the output was enormous and might be considered the last major effort before the onset of the Early Machine Age. . . .

The paintings of Pietro and Alessandro Longhi are works of great

social interest (though in my opinion not comparable with those of Hogarth, as has sometimes been asserted) in which are to be found the echoes of gossip, tittle-tattle and domestic small talk. Never do they concern themselves with any issues greater than everyday trifles, with dressmaking and toilet scenes, chamber concerts, dancing lessons and suchlike, in which there is no note of tragedy—where all is elegance, prettiness and domestic bliss. . . . And yet by portraying these very scenes they are a criticism of the age. Satire often wears a charming mask. . . . But it is in the minor arts that the eighteenth century hurries to a close, in which are to be found the last pleasant sighs of the Venetian spirit. . . . To the last they remained engaging seaside arts.

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THE Ballroom of the Palazzo Rezzonico is a fine example of architectural illusionist painting, an art whose total eclipse must be regretted if only for the loss of astonishment it affords. Today our rooms have contracted with our notions of what a home should be, but in those days there were no doubts that life should be spent at an endless series of receptions, parties and balls. . . . As though the great salons were not large enough to contain the throng, they were enlarged by the skilful use of optical illusions: architecture expanded to match the blown-out personalities, and eventually the gusts of gossip blew away among the clouds on the painted ceilings, in a blaze of Olympian sunshine. . . . All the furnishings became stage properties, and each noble house arranged a series of theatrical sets for itself against which the family drama could be played. For the sake of convenience they were arranged side by side: from the wings of one set they entered the next until, having walked all round the quadrangle, the play started again and continued, with only slight variations, for years. . . . Our only grumble today is that they all strove for parts in the same play, and consequently one palace is very much like another. Individuality was reduced to a minimum perhaps for fear of offending visitors, who, being both audience and actors at the same time, would have been disconcerted to find that they had arrived in a strange setting to act a play the words of which they did not know. Conformity in furnishing had the virtue of putting everybody instantly at their ease. . . .

The Palazzo Rezzonico is no exception to the rule, and though a splendid place, with decorations in the grand manner, it offers none

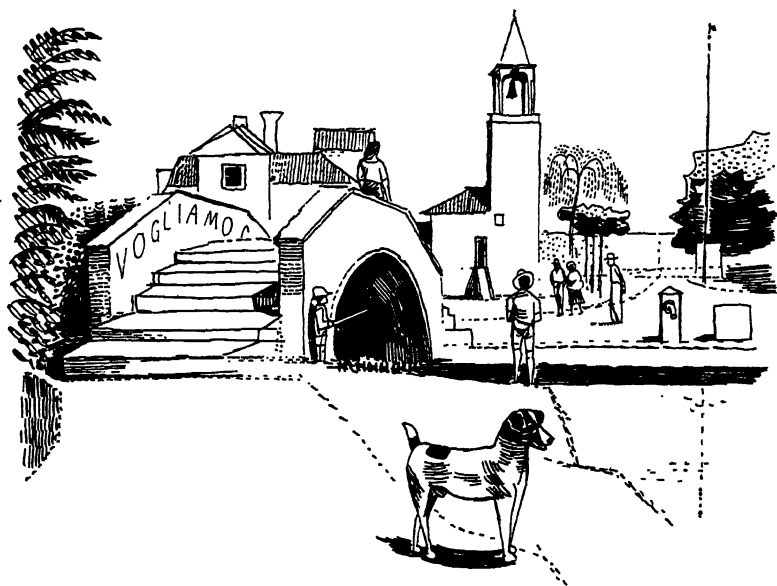
of those quiet little surprises to be found in English country houses. We can thus pass quickly through the series of salons which have ceilings by Giambattista Tiepolo, of great cleverness and unpleasantness, and ascend into the upper rooms to see the paintings of Giandomenico, his son, which are among the most interesting in Venice. They are the series of frescoes transferred from his villa at Zianigo, and they bring this huge dead palace to life again and revive the pleasant afterglow of the Venetian holiday. They are full of the airs of villa life, figures quietly strolling or dancing among the umbrella pines, the pleasing idiocies of *pagliacci* who are doing acrobatics in the trees or resting, exhausted with pleasure, upon green banks, among empty wine jugs and food baskets, their shuttlecocks and battledores beside them. Or else they hint at the Carnival, with tumblers performing in the streets, or, as in that superb painting "*The New World*," we join the back of a crowd of eighteenth-century Venetians and with them for ever guess at the mysteries of the charlatans. . . .

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THEN it is, in these upper rooms, among the embroidered waistcoats, the lace cuffs, the *tricornes*, the white masks, black lace shawls and fans, that shadowy figures come to life. . . . Among the rows of puppets, standing asleep with their eyes open, we are reminded of the bright scenes of Carnival, the fantastic humour of Harlequin, Columbine, Isabelle and Scaramouche, Pulcinello and Pantaloon. . . . Here is a picture of Harlequin the artist painting the portrait of a beautiful lady. But he dips his brush into a jar of wine and the portrait is a bearded lady. There is Harlequin dressed as a woman, in bonnet and dress with a rose upon his bosom. He is busy with bobbin-lace upon a cushion, while beside him stands Columbine holding her mask. . . . And then, on the way out, we are startled by the figure of a man, one foot high, on the centre of a mantel-piece. He has a red coat, white waistcoat, black breeches and *tricorne*. Standing in a breeze from an open window, his head nods gently, his mouth opens and shuts, his eyes roll. . . .

## PART THREE





## Torcello

HOW easy it is to make a resolution to slip away from Venice, but how difficult to carry out the plan. For a long time I have been meaning to go to Torcello, and now, on the very day that I had planned to go, there is a *sirocco* which keeps me spellbound in the dark alleys, moving fitfully in the shade like a cat. (I had almost said glued to Venice, for on these days one sticks to everything, almost literally, so humid is the air, so heavy does one become in body and mind.) But it is not very far from the vortex of heat around St. Mark's to the boat-station on the Fondamente Nuove if one sidles easily in the shade of the labyrinth between the Campo Santa Maria Formosa and the Campo San Zanipolo. Even the statue of Colleone seems to be glistening on his horse today. On the canal of the Rio dei Mendicanti a gondola ambulance is leaving the hospital, painted grey and white with a blue cross on the sides, with a smart team of men working the blue-and-white oars. I cannot tell whether the slight smell of disinfectant makes the air more pleasant or more sickly. On the northern quayside there is some shade, but it is a kind of hot vacuum, where nothing stirs, and beyond, the water of the lagoon looks like oil, slow-moving and yellow. Near the boat-station are the workshops of the monumental masons, where the men are chipping their white marble in

spite of the heat. The white angels in the dark interior look like snow maidens, and the slabs of dead white marble like ice. Groups of loafers hang round the cafés near the landing-stage, doing little except wait for the evening, when gossip will be easier and the air cooler.

The boat to Torcello pushes its way through the oily sea and Venice sways away southwards, the quayside a shadowy blur, relieved only by the white statues wriggling on the high cornices of the Jesuit church close by, and the innumerable bell towers to east and west that even yet I have not learned to identify. To the left, on the northernmost tip of Venice, is the Casa degli Spiriti, lonely now but once a gambling haunt, and where, as at an inn, the corpses spent their last night before they were taken across the water to the cemetery. I have never yet made my way towards Murano or Torcello without passing a funeral on the water, and the mornings seem to be the popular times. On the right, halfway to Murano, is the Isola di San Michele, the island given over to the dead. This necropolis is walled all round, completely enclosed to keep the sight of those white marble tombstones from the gaze of passers-by—a forbidding, efficient-looking island. Our boat slows down as it passes the large black water hearse. There are golden scrolls on the prow and stern, and on the prow a huge golden globe with outspread wings. The coffin lies under a bonfire of gladioli, flaming vermilion against the yellow-green sea, and four old gondoliers dressed entirely in black slowly bring the body to the gateway of the cemetery. They are met by a scamper of waiting relatives and a skirted priest. There is quite a holiday atmosphere about the funerals of San Michele in spite of the obvious sadness of the event. I can think of no better kind of funeral than to be rowed slowly over the lagoon under a heap of gladioli to rest on an island in the loneliness north of Venice.

Murano is quickly reached and we are greeted by the group of boys who are always swarming around the rocks near the lighthouse, in and out of the water all day long. What an odd lighthouse this is, built of drums of white marble like a child's tower out of cotton reels. A few glimpses up the canals of Murano and we glide past the backs of the glass factories, most of which seem to be windowless, and then out into the open along the sea lane marked by posts between the shallows of the dead lagoons. On either side are flat little islands, a few inches above water level, yellow and



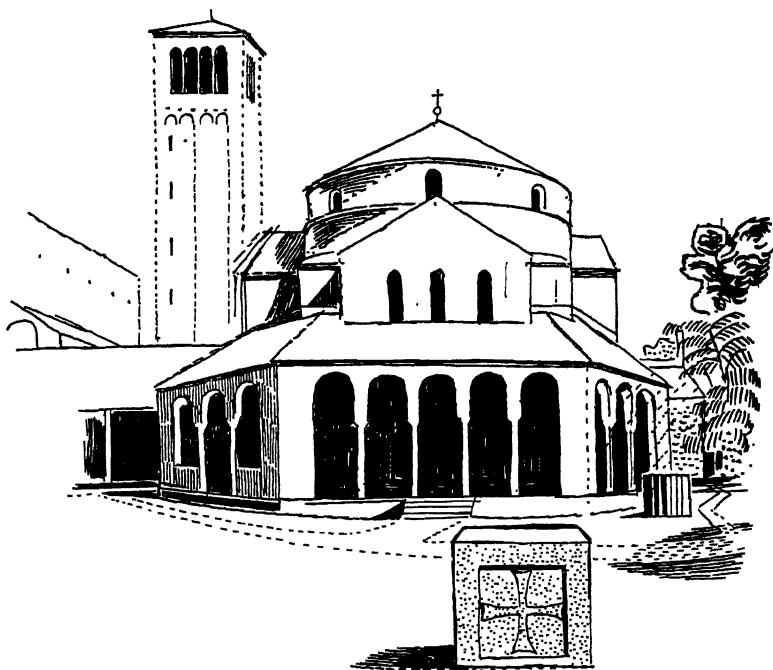
scorched in the sun, looking for all the world like coconut mats floating on the surface. To the north is a quiet wilderness of water, with hundreds of posts sticking up, taking the cables and the telephone wires to the mainland and marking out the boat channels. Behind us are the towers of Venice, to the right the cypresses of the Isola del Deserto, and ahead the leaning tower of Burano, while beyond, low on the horizon and scarcely visible, is the solitary tower of Torcello. There are a few orange sails dotted about the lagoons, and we pass groups of fishermen dragging their nets; all looks deserted and absolutely still except for one or two butterflies making their way towards the islands. We reach Burano and pass up the narrow channel between the low-lying gardens, the verges overhung with broom and tamarisk, and thence to Torcello.

By the time the boat reaches Torcello I am the only one to get out, and I make my way along the towpath that might be, and indeed is, a country lane, for on either side are orchards, vineyards, maize and sunflowers. Then over the small bridge and I am on the village green. . . . Rose-pink Torcello! At last the smell of hay and flowers, and the sight of green grass after weeks of stewing in Venice! I had almost forgotten the flavour of the country—the sight of grapes ripening, vegetables growing, poppies and convolvulus in the hedges. The artichokes had been long gathered in, though one or two purple heads were left, bearded, mixed up with the silver knobs of onion flowers on their long, fat stalks. The roses too were over, but here they are left to drop, hanging like garlands after a festival. Now is the time in these wild gardens for tiger lilies, huge globe peonies, dahlias and marguerites growing in the pear and apple orchards and among the vines.

I have just mentioned the village green, but it is a village green without a village. Torcello could not even be described as a hamlet, for there are only four or five buildings left besides the Basilica of Santa Maria Assunta and the church of San Fosca. For the rest, apart from an occasional isolated fisherman's cottage, the island is deserted. The churches are the only visible remains of a once-flourishing city that existed before Venice was built. A few stones there are, and well-heads and remains of carvings, but it is an island that is overgrown with greenery, a quiet garden set in the lagoons.

Now the boat from Venice always seems to bring visitors to

Torcello in time for lunch, and for this purpose a restaurant, spacious and clean, has been prepared, where it is possible to eat as well as anywhere in Venice. The "Locanda," as it is called, is not as innocent as it looks, nor as simple, for this restaurant, being the only one on the island, has been the haunt of visiting kings, princes and princesses, film stars, famous authors, and famous artists. Of this we are made aware quite early on, if we have not already heard of it before, or glanced at those photographs of mysterious visitors in dark glasses in the glossy magazines of Venice. It is an excellent restaurant, with tables under a vine pergola, in and out of which the swallows dart. Though I was the first arrival, an array of international visitors appeared in no time. Not many, but enough to know that Torcello does not remain deserted at mealtimes and enough to observe the behaviour of different nationalities at table. What do they eat? The Italians, it seems, are particular about food, as indeed they should be. But this couple are almost what one might describe as fussy and they behave like soda syphons. They choose, eventually, fish. There are two Austrians next to me, crisp-looking, with that odd fixed grin through which they talk—a sign of perpetual pleasure. They choose steak. Behind me are an English couple, who appear suspicious. They mumble and choose veal. But by far the most interesting on this occasion are a group of Spaniards, a group of old ladies straight out of a Goya painting, with gorgeous jewellery and red claws. Among them is an extremely beautiful nurse of Moorish lineage, and a completely uninhibited youth in a silk suit who talks incessantly at the top of his voice while the old ladies gaze and nod and shake their bangles. The ladies eat with the fastidiousness of large cats, the Moorish girl eats everything with zest, while the youth balances morsels on a fork, because he has no time to eat between sentences, and adjusts his hair. The Spaniards choose veal and so much else besides that they almost have a banquet. . . . Later, upon the village green I met a German student, an architect, whom I found had not enough money to eat at all. He came from the ruins of Berlin to visit Italy for the first time in his young life. What sort of life had he led up to now? He decided to go for a swim behind the Basilica, a proceeding which I would have thought would only have increased his hunger. Better by far to have gone into an orchard and helped himself to fruit. We met later in the cathedral; he being a German, I knew I could dispense with my guide-book. But I felt sorry for him, and



*San Fosca, Torcello*

admired the way the young Germans are making their way into Italy this year, most of them as poor as church mice.

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SANTA MARIA ASSUNTA and San Fosca form a brave group of buildings, and in their present position, surrounded by old trees and orchards, and flanking the lawn, they look impressively lonely. San Fosca is built in the Byzantine style and brings the flavour of the Bosphorus on to this remote island at the head of the lagoons. It is one of those fascinating exercises of interlocking cubes and octagons and drums, and originally it was intended to be finished off with a dome, but like so much else here it was never completed. The arcades of stilted arches have, however, slim and elegant columns of Greek marble with capitals in the Venetian-Byzantine style—the only ornaments on a shell that might have presented a surface as richly encrusted as St. Mark's had not the main stream of history flowed on to Venice.

The Basilica of Santa Maria Assunta close by is as impressive as

a huge barn, stark and strong, with a ninth-century campanile of extreme simplicity, built of rose-pink brick, weathered and powdering. The entry into this basilica must be the opposite to the entry into that apotheosis of churches—St. Peter's in Rome. Entering the latter, one is immediately thrown into a swoon at the sight of so much richness, but here one is overcome by an extraordinary sense of quietness and dignity. It is one of the most satisfactory interiors I know. Whether this is due to the fact that the church was never finished, and thus is not encrusted with marbles, or whether it is an echo in my mind of the simplicity of our northern cathedrals, I cannot tell. It may well be that it is because it is such a relief to enter a church where one doesn't immediately have to start sorting things out. The majority of Italian churches, especially those in cities like Venice, are so full of the fervour of centuries and the over-enthusiasm of devotees that they are the most tiring buildings in the world. One has to work hard in Italian churches. . . . But here the simplicity does all that the elaboration of others can never do.

The light in this church on a sunny day—it would be equally dark in the winter time—is soft and bright, reflected from the powdery colours of old bricks and plaster. It glows with a kind of whiteness lit by windows from the south, east and west. The cold light of the north does not enter. A curious feature of the windows is that they have huge stone shutters hung upon stone hinges, to be closed against the winter gales. The walls of the huge nave are plain brick, completely unadorned, supported on Corinthian columns of white and grey Greek marble. The pavement is of a geometric design of inlaid marbles, similar to those of San Donato at Murano and St. Mark's, Venice, but simpler. There is a rood screen of the fifteenth century with the remains of pictures of the Virgin and Apostles, and underneath, panels of marble and alabaster intricately carved with peacocks and lions. The double pulpits are of great elegance, completely made of slabs and drums and knobs of marble, and the high altar is a mere table of marble. It is as though the builders of Torcello were taking away their stones to Venice before they had time to finish their cathedral. It is a church abandoned, and all the better for it. The city had gone before the plans were carried out, and most of the marbles and the porphyry, the inlays and incrustations of mosaic were reserved for St. Mark's. Behind the high altar rise the tiers of the tribune with a centre flight of steps to the bishop's throne, reminding one irresistibly of the Roman origins of the

basilican church, and in a chamber under the apse is a baptistry, sunken it might be, below sea level, like a cave. A huge stone chair hewn out of a boulder, enthusiastically called "Attila's Throne," and said to have been brought from the mainland by the early settlers, is kept in this church. Around the walls of the aisles are four carved and gilded altars of later centuries, one of which has a painting of the School of Tintoretto. These altars by no means spoil the effect of the early church, but four altars to represent five hundred years show how much Torcello was abandoned. The most valuable possessions of Santa Maria Assunta are the mosaics of the apses and the great west wall. But first let us visit the shrine of St. Heliodorus who lies under the high altar. St. Heliodorus, one-time bishop here, lies under a perforated marble grill, and we are shown his mummy by a cheerful ten-year-old boy who is supplied with tapers and matches for the purpose. Heliodorus is a shrivelled little man, wrapped in a cocoon of grave clothes, his old brown skull somehow turned the wrong way round, as though he were sleeping on his face. For some odd reason his glass-topped coffin is supported on leather thongs which enable the ten-year-old to swing him to and fro and from side to side. This is the cheerful spirit in which the corpse of Heliodorus is shown to visitors. . . .

The mosaics of the right apsidal chapel were being restored and I could not see them for scaffolding. But soon I fell into conversation with the artist who was restoring them (with the aid of a large *fiasco* of wine and a basket of fruit). He invited me on to the top platform of his wooden scaffolding, which perilously swayed and creaked and was full of death-traps, in order to see more clearly what he was doing. How wonderful it was to be right up against the mosaics at the top of an apse, to be able to touch their rough, shining surfaces and to put one's hand into the boxes of new stones and let them run through one's fingers! Below, through the cracks and crannies of the planks, was the pavement of the cathedral, along which were moving the occasional visitors, led by the boy with the lighted taper to see the mummy of St. Heliodorus. Up here all was quiet and workmanlike, a little studio in an eyrie, with the great-eyed figures of saints and angels peering straight into one's face. But all was not well with the mosaics, for gently feeling them all over we found many patches which were quite loose. Another year or two and they would have fallen down, and their drawing would have been lost. The method of restoration is very simple in principle,

though different from that used in St. Mark's which I have described elsewhere in this book. A thick coat of *gesso* plaster is put over the loose areas, and then when it is dry they are cut out. The pieces are lifted away from the curved vault intact and the backs of the stones are picked clean of old plaster. The areas of decayed plaster, which is in a powdered condition, are completely cleaned away, and new cement is laid. Into this the mosaics are placed, and when set the temporary skin of *gesso* is removed and washed away. It seems that some of the old plaster was of a quite inferior quality, sometimes made only of chalk, so the old mosaicists didn't always use the most permanent of materials after all. Our new grey cements seem hard enough, and once put back into place the mosaics should stay in position for many centuries to come. Only in very small areas are the stones picked out and relaid by the restorer himself, and though there is a danger here of losing the original drawing if it were overdone, the major part of the restoration is merely a matter of removing the loose areas intact and putting them back again into sound plaster. After the mosaics my restorer friend, by now enthusiastic, wanted to show me the secrets of the pavement, and so we climbed down into the body of the church. The present pavement, he told me, was not very old, that is to say, it was laid down about A.D. 1200—modern as these things go in Italy—but underneath he says there exists another, much finer, a figured one in black and white mosaic. So out came the inevitable box of matches and we poked down holes, and after scratching for some time in the wet soil, sure enough we came across the other pavement. But it would be too costly to remove the present one; and how do we know that if it were removed we would find a complete design underneath? The present pavement is fine enough: let us leave it alone.

The great mosaic of the Last Judgment on the west wall is the work of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and is the only completed portion of what must have been a scheme to cover the whole of the interior. We are left to guess what the rest might have been like. It rises like a glittering cliff of precious stones and gold in an empty cave. The incidents of the story are laid in with all the vivid, uncompromising drawing of the period. There is no sentimentality here, no softening of the blows. Hell is horrid. Paradise is splendid. Christ is the Universal Master, and the great Archangels are the guardians of the world. Belief is absolute and crystallized, dogma reigns supreme. In our scientific century, when we have come to

know so much of the terrifying complications of the universe that men are more bewildered than ever, all this delightful symbolism seems somewhat oversimplified. But the realities of suffering and the torments of Hell were ever more vivid than the bliss of Paradise, so in that respect we have made no forward strides. The scenes of Hell in this mosaic are full of incident, Paradise overwhelmingly respectable. A grey and white devil, assisted by fiends and two angels of fire, are thrusting kings, princes, rich and poor sinners into the flames. People are sitting naked in flames, unaided by their earthly power or position, all vaguely suffering, with the expressionless, timeless faces of Byzantine art. Four naked figures, which must be ladies, are standing in a stinking pit, holding their noses. A group of people are immersed in ice-cold water in total darkness. Underneath them are massed skulls with worms coming out of their sockets, and finally two panels of assorted heads and skulls, hands, feet and ribs. This last panel is about the last word in pessimism. From the gloom of this side of the mosaic let us go on to the more pleasant imaginings. On the left are some of those magic creatures, the most guileless of all the creations of Christian art—cherubim and seraphim, with piquant faces framed in haloes, peeping out of three pairs of wings, their naked feet held primly together. Above the various scenes of judgment, in which splendidly drawn angels are trumpeting and rushing, as it were, from one side of the church to the other, is a scene of Paradise. Christ is seated in an egg-shaped nimbus of glory surrounded by saints and apostles and a vast crowd of the blessed. Like all scenes of Paradise, it is healthy and aseptic, somewhat boring and full of old people. Worms and demons are banished, and all is bland and placid and gloriously calm. But the most vivid panel of all is at the top of the mosaic, showing Christ triumphant over evil, with two archangels holding symbols of the world over which Christianity is supreme. Speaking purely from an artistic standpoint, the figures of the two archangels are the best in the whole mosaic. Each is about fifteen feet high, clad in dalmatic of jewels and pearls, in white, blue, gold and red—figures of monumental richness and splendour. The whole mosaic, over the entire wall, is in coloured marbles and glass on a gold ground.

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I WAS so enthusiastic about Santa Maria Assunta that almost everything seemed delightful, even the heavy chair of Attila—such a

great bull-throne this, a tribal chair—as well as the carved and gilded altars, and the baroque processional crosses leaning in corners. There is even an old hat hanging from one of the tie beams, left no doubt as an offering for prayers fulfilled long ago. The Basilica in our time shows signs of restoration and cleaning up, but here for a thousand years it has stood, unfinished and almost abandoned. The stones of the city have disappeared, there are no remains of the once splendid palaces of Torcello: all has been transported to Venice except the Basilica itself, and up to our own age it was hardly visited except occasionally by the more intrepid traveller.

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NAPOLEON'S name crops up all over the place in this part of the world. He is mentioned in connection with the restoration of Santa Maria Assunta, but I do not know how far his interest went. He was a great traveller and took an abundant interest in historic places, mostly for his own glorification, as conquerors do. (Did he not tear down the far end of the Piazza San Marco and erect that hard-looking building that bears his name? Did he not also steal the Horses from the front of St. Mark's to grace his own triumphal arch in front of the Louvre?) After all, it is the privilege of conquerors to leave their mark upon the scenes of their most glorious victories. Even today people carve their names upon the old stones in token of their visits, to show that they have conquered by merely coming here and suffering the hardships of the journey. Napoleon took a sightseer's interest in his empire that might have been disastrous for art had he not fallen before he had had time to really get to work on "improving" Italy. Paris is city enough for one nation. Let us hope that all dictators are short-lived upon the Continent. What would he have done to London if he had ever got there? He would have had a fine time, no doubt, driving avenues and putting up triumphal archways and providing us with Napoleonicas. He might even have been strong enough to clear away the huddle of buildings around Westminster Abbey or St. Paul's so that we could see them better. London might have been more beautiful but certainly less English. As it is, in the Banqueting Hall in Whitehall, our best public building, which we use as a military lumber-room, we have the next best thing to a Napoleonica—we have the skeleton of Napoleon's horse, which the English understand far better.

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*Garden at Torcello*

SITTING here in the late afternoon I cannot help thinking how nice it is to get away from Venice after wandering for so long about the alleys and hopping over the stagnant canals. Live in Venice any length of time and you get used to the smells, but come here to Torcello among the flowers and hay and you realize what you've missed. Not that I personally could stand this place for very long, unless I had some purpose, such as writing a book. Torcello has been used for that before now. But a group of six buildings and one of the most perfect basilicas in the world on a flat island growing nothing but plants cannot compensate for the man-made pleasures of that exotic old jewel-box over the water. Torcello is, however, a quiet and secluded spot, as much at the end of the world as anywhere could be, in which to contemplate and collect yourself. When Venice gets too much for you, glide over the water and live on this island for a few days. But choose your times carefully, for mobs of international sightseers, well-meaning hounds of hell, will follow you. In the early part of the day, or round about early evening, you can have the place practically to yourself. In the evenings all things turn red and gold, and that little cathedral and church over there look as though they are made of onyx and amber, and the birdsong becomes louder than the broken accents of visitors and

guides. There is nothing save the sun, the breeze, the endless sky, the shimmering lagoons, cicadas in the orchards, ducks busy in the rushes and lizards darting among the stones. A few children play in innocence on the green lawns, unaware that this was once the forum of a busy city, where were seen the jewelled dalmatic, the mitre, the curtained palanquin, and where the conquerors from East and West milled around in front of the Basilica, even before the first stones were laid on the Rialto. At the present day everything is spotlessly clean, windswept, sweet-smelling, vast and low-lying. Come here to make an escape from Venice, from claustrophobia, from enervating luxury, from enervating poverty, from art, from architecture, from crowds.

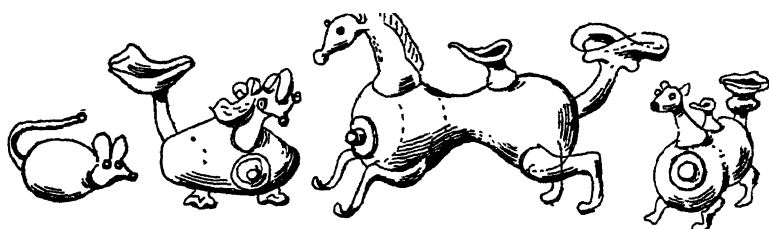
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BUT I am never satisfied. In an hour from now my boat will take me back to Venice. Already the sea and the sky are saffron and purple. . . .

I will throw my shutters open, and that coral palace with gilded tips will be in front of me again, the great tower with its bells, the thousands of pigeons, the noise, the fine sight of people.







### *Murano: Venetian Glass*

WHAT a miracle of survival it is that examples of this most characteristic and most brittle of all the arts of Venice should have come down to us in the twentieth century! We feel that we must walk warily on tiptoe through the museum, and not bump into anything; that, big and clumsy as we are, we must scarcely look upon this glittering array of exotic glass lest we shatter it. For it is as though the sunlit spume of the sea has splashed and crystallized, as though the craftsmen had taken handfuls of sea water from the lagoons and modelled them into fantastic shapes. At first we do not think of the fire in which the glass was melted, but of water only, for it looks as if the sea had been playful, as if eddies had stood still, holding for ever the little monsters and fishes in clear crystal, as, in that other age, flies and insects were preserved in amber. For here are all the colours of the sea, in all its moods, and the colours of the water of the canals of Venice and Murano—the pale blue of the sea in the mornings, the green of the afternoons, the dark green of the canals in the shade or of deep pools, and the pure, pale glitter of water from the fountains dripping through the fingers in the sun.

The early glass of Murano links up the craft of these islands with the Romans, and it is like taking a walk upon some forgotten beach, where nobody has trodden for centuries, to see these little lustre pebbles in rows. How like old shells they are, shining with the colours of dark pearls—remnants of boxes, small vases, fragments of dishes, a variety of lids. As though they were bits of glass washed up upon the beaches from towns that have disappeared under the waves long ago. Farther back still, if we care to go, are examples of Greek glass, and rows of beads from Egypt, hinting at the movement of the craft from its remote beginnings in Africa, whence it came to rest on Murano, and flowered for centuries on these safe islands away from the marauders of the mainland. The fragments from the Roman period of Murano are small—the large pieces have long ago been broken up—but here we can see the beginnings of the twists and turns, a slight decoration on a lid, the spiral on a

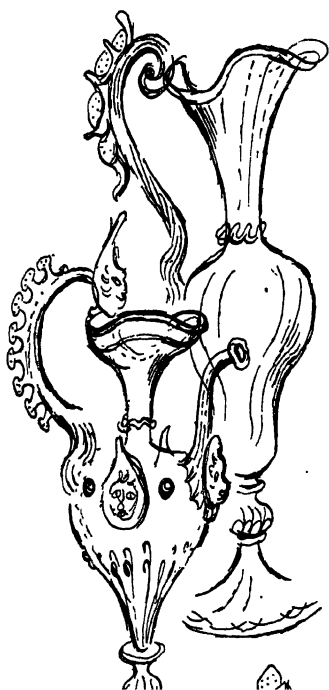
handle, the slight undulation on the lip of a drinking-glass. They are echoes only from the past, but they were prophetic.

The art of glass is a small art. Chandeliers and mirrors were perhaps the biggest objects made. But it is at its best in the intimate objects, at its best when concerned with enjoyment. For most of the glass has to do with the table, with drinking and eating—glasses to hold wine, dishes for fruit, bowls for water. Bottles of all shapes and sizes, flasks for wine, for oil, bottles for perfumes, small pots for cosmetics. It is essentially an art of luxury, and as luxury in Venice meant the exotic, the glass of Murano became the most witty, the most ephemeral and the most fantastic of all her arts. In Venetian glass is caught the full flavour of her sophistication, for glass, more than any other medium, seems to express the character of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Venice—the unique æsthetic born of her isolated position in the sea. It is an art born of an intimate knowledge of the sea, an art of fishermen, of spikes and points and knobs, of ropes, of fish-bones. The glass is strangely phosphorescent, it shines and glitters with the colours of fish scales, it has all the extreme delicacy of fishes, all the unusual qualities of seaweeds and sea flowers. There are the whorls of shells, the spikiness of crabs, the little cruelties of claws, the array of fins. There is the recurring motif of the fish's mouth on spouts and openings, the waving tentacles on handles. Nothing is straight or stiff, everything moves. All the ellipses of drinking vessels undulate, the lips of cups and wine glasses are waved and sometimes spiked, as though made of water or as though floating in water. Glass is splashed about for decoration like sea spray, it is flecked like foam. Dishes are eddies of glass, small whirlpools, where strands of white, blue and red whirl around from the centre. Drinking-glasses become miniature waterspouts, rushing upwards, as though blown and expanded by the wind, encrusted with fish motifs which have been sucked upwards and somehow left there in mid-air. All these little horses, pigs, mice are really underwater monsters, harmless creatures, grotesque, amusing and witty, used as bottles on the table for oil and vinegar. The jugs bristle with spikes like shellfish, they have handles like the suckers of the octopus, spouts like the waving mouths of eels and sea snakes, lips like fishes, helplessly open. Nothing is what it seems, for all is transformed by the imagination and wrought in glass. The monsters are transparent. They shine in the air and glitter in the sun, but if they were immersed in water they would disappear and

become part of it immediately. The glass of this period, though it never forgot its basis of Roman shapes, is surprisingly free from the main interests of Renaissance art. Whereas architecture was pursuing its course of revivalism, the craftsmen of Murano seemed to create their own shapes. Admittedly they took the basis of the urn, the amphora, the classic cup as their first idea, and then seemed to transform them, as I have said, into something unique and strange. I suspect that the craftsmen of Murano at this time were always workmen, for their art always seems to possess a vernacular quality. It is always spontaneous, free from archæology, does not rely too much on prototypes from antiquity.

This was not always so, however, for occasionally they came under the influences of other crafts and other ideas. In glass reliquaries of the sixteenth century they echo the rigidities of metal prototypes. In these glass chambers, made to hold the fragments of saints, the shapes are rigid and upstanding, fine in themselves, though sober and dull compared with the mad sea-riot of the tableware. Only on the little crosses of the lids do they become lively and echo the golden knobblies on the domes of St. Mark's. At this time too, and in fact into the seventeenth century, there is a great deal of diamond point work, where the ornaments of other crafts—notably of engraving—are applied to simple dishes, bowls and goblets. On the whole it is mercifully quite crude, simply a drawing on glass with a diamond point, a drawing that any one of us might do to idle away an hour. At first, simple foliations, or a spray of flowers, perhaps with birds perching among the leaves, all roughly scratched in line with the solid areas scribbled in. Only later did this lead to the sophisticated wheel engraving which had so many abuses and so many mis-applications at later periods.

The extreme playfulness, the youthfulness of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century glass gave way by the eighteenth century to more sober shapes. The utilitarian aspect seemed to be in the ascendant, though not for long, as I will show in a moment. They seemed to develop a large proportion of plain and sensible shapes, sturdy and strong—wine-glasses, plates, dishes, candlesticks and so forth, as well as glassware for the apothecary. We might assume that the majority of the glass at this period was as sensible as in our own day, for the craft had become skilful almost to a mechanical degree. But the craftsmen had by no means forgotten their exotic traditions; and being Venetians they had not lost their sense of humour. So





before long they committed delightful æsthetic audacities, released themselves from the bondage of utility and classicism, and out of a general background of good taste they adopted the playful antics for which their forefathers had been famous. Cruets became nests of dolphins, sea-horses cavorted on lids or round the bases of candle-sticks. On the walls were hung glass pistols and fowling-pieces, glass trumpets a yard long, glass walking-sticks like sugar-candy, and on the sideboards were wine barrels made of glass. Further to add to their jollity they created a range of ships in bottles, and, to make it more Venetian, bird cages and birds in bottles, and spinning-wheels in bottles. They created huge *compotiers* of glass fruits—lemons, tomatoes, oranges, pears, cherries and other fruits of a dreamy, other-worldly nature that never grew on any tree, except in the orchard of a Venetian designer's mind, all so succulent, so like sweets, with crystallized leaves. The idea of sugar and glass takes over from water and glass. The glass now tempts us to pluck it and to taste it. As well as *compotiers* of fruits, they made others to hold the severed heads of flowers, breeding a very unusual range of dahlias and carnations, and clusters like artichokes; and to complete their folly they made knives, forks and spoons in glass. Nor did their art stop at mere secular application, but spread its gaudy happiness on to the altars of the church. They developed, most successfully, large sprays of everlasting glass flowers and modelled votive figures in glass paste. For the home—though it might well have been for the churches—they made extraordinarily sophisticated holy water stoups, where the rococo element outstrips itself in delicacy and effeminacy. The sense of fun triumphed at last and art gave way to amusement. As in the earlier centuries, when glass most expressed the attenuated refinement and youthful beauty of the period, so in the eighteenth century glass once more expresses, far more than all the other arts, the sentimentality, the decadence and occasionally the hysteria of Venice. From being the robust art of the table it had become the art of the boudoir and the dressing-table.

Though we must assume that most of the glass of the period was of the more sober variety—or it would have been *quite* useless—we must also assume that most of it got broken, for today only the more exotic pieces have come down to us intact. Glass which is purely utilitarian must nearly always eventually be dropped, but the lilies of the field lived out their lives in corner cupboards, away from the

drinking and the eating, thus giving us a slightly false view of the situation. There were, of course, other semi-sensible applications of glass ornamentation, as in the very attractive range of decorated glass handles to real cutlery, as well as to beads and jewellery, including the exquisite miniature figures in glass paste called "Lattimi." Side by side with this there ran other abuses of the craft, which may have been prompted by economic competition, such as the attempts to imitate pottery. But whereas real Venetian pottery in the Chinese style is delightful and sensible, the opaque white glass imitations are nearly always bad. Extraordinary skill must have been used to imitate the crisp shapes of porcelain, but the glass shapes still retain their natural fluidity and the decoration looks uneasy. It was an attempt to displace porcelain by a cheaper product, and the vogue has only been equalled by similar imitations in Victorian times.

The crowning folly of Venetian glass in the eighteenth century was the production of "gardens" for table-tops. Here at Murano is a large table, big enough to seat thirty people to dinner. But they would eat nothing, for the whole table-top is taken up with a glass garden called, adequately enough, "Un Trionfo da Tavola," from the Palazzo Morosini. It is a kind of monster *epergne* that has spread outwards to the very edges of the table, and it is only a wonder that they didn't use the underneath part of the table to create a glass grotto of the underworld, into which guests could crawl after they had tired of the garden on the table-top. It is in the form of an eighteenth-century formal garden, with arches, fountains, avenues and all the more rigid elements so beloved of palace gardens, imitated with great skill in glass. But having emerged but recently from the era of the Crystal Palace, and therefore being in a position to judge enormities of taste with a certain degree of accuracy, I have found a better one in another room. It is in front of me as I write and it is only a yard square. On a sheet of glass, sprinkled with glass gravel and grass, rises a fountain a foot high in six tiers. From a hundred spouts glass water is in the act of gushing, eventually coming stiffly to rest in a basin of crushed spun glass. All the water looks frozen, but frozen out of season, for all over the fountain and surrounding it are little white urns, each with a rather sticky looking bunch of miniature glass flowers in it. But what is most alarming are the six spun glass butterflies with beady eyes which have come to rest on them. On the verges of this garden are glass balustrades, curving

gaily round the corners, with knobs of clear glass upon them, and at each side of the table gateposts of clear glass mounted with white urns.

In quite another category are Venetian chandeliers, unless it is that I have a weakness for them. These magnificent riots of coloured glass extend the range of exoticism to its greatest. They are the apotheosis of things Venetian. They are like firework displays of glass suspended in mid-air, clusters of flowers showering down from heaven, made to glitter in the candlelight, magnificent examples of grandeur and folly. The ones here at Murano are fine enough, but there is one at the Ca' Rezzonico hanging from a painted ceiling which is better still. This, though no longer fitted with candles, but wired for electricity, has the instantaneously magical effect that only electric lights in a Venetian chandelier could give.

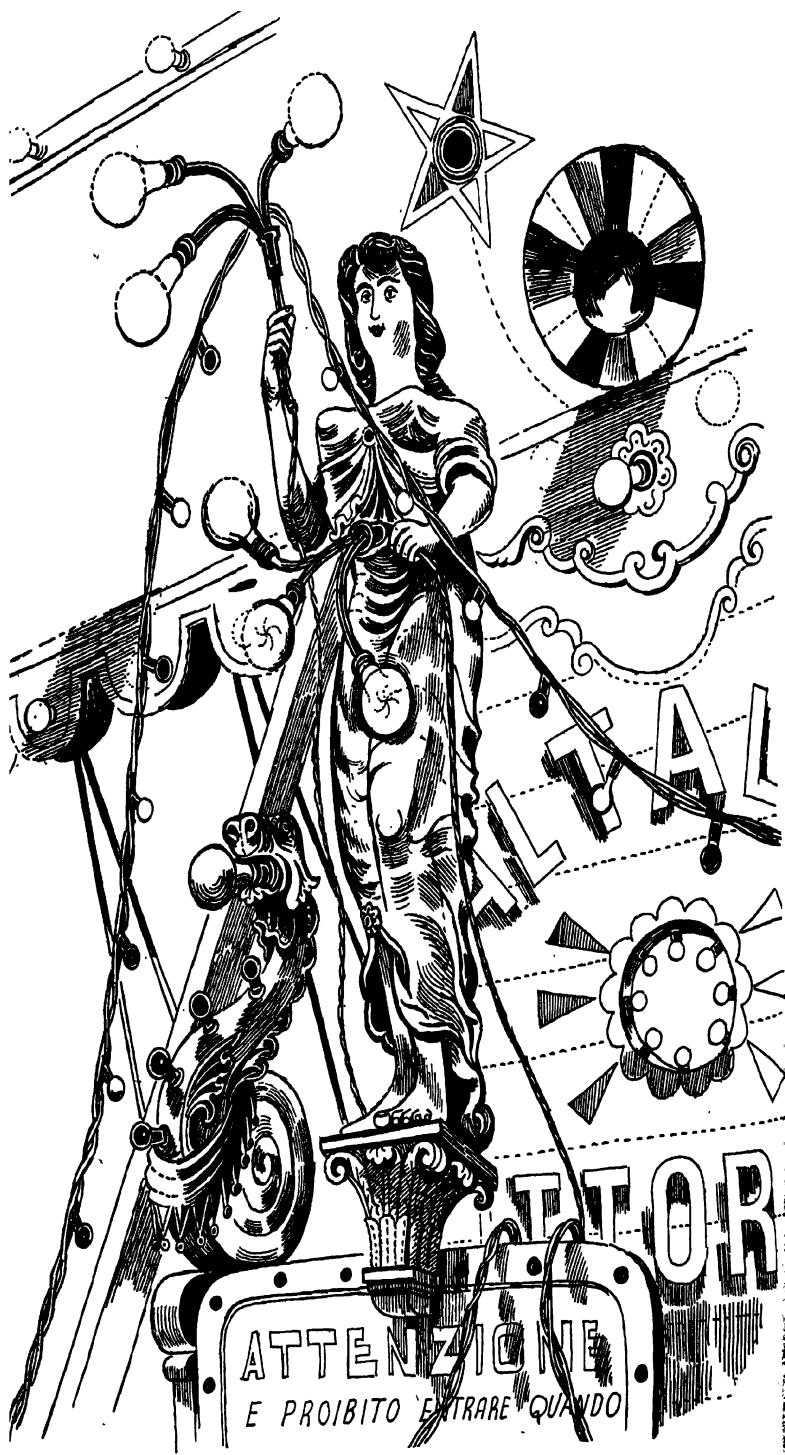
The eighteenth-century glass table gardens bring us with ease into that century of centuries, the nineteenth, where we would expect astonishing things to happen to the development of Venetian glass. Nor are we disappointed, as I will show in a moment, though we are also surprised, for here at last, if Venetian glass were to come into its own again, this was the time for it to do so. The nineteenth century was a period when art looked backwards more with nostalgia than with learning. There was always a tear in the eye and a throb in the voice, and the artists, somewhat bewildered amidst an array of new and upsetting mechanical inventions, made sentimentalized reproductions of the work of their forefathers to grace the imitation palaces of the newly-elevated middle classes. In England the bewildered were led by Ruskin back into the shadowy briar-patch of medievalism, but in Venice, true to tradition, they halted themselves in a gayer period, namely the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. And thus in the revivalism of nineteenth-century Venetian glass we find some very pleasant pieces of work. In reviving the ornaments of the best period of Venetian glass they renewed acquaintance with the true technique of glass making, a technique which essentially is surprisingly simple and straightforward. On to the basic shapes of blown glass they added their ornaments by picking and plucking, nipping and pinching, stamping, looping and twisting, while the glass was still in a molten condition. That they pinched, plucked, twisted and looped to excess in this century goes without saying, but that joy came back to the industry cannot be doubted.

The characteristic of this period is that individual pieces became

enormous, as though giants and giantesses sat down to dinner. There are wine-glasses large enough to hold pints, tureens large enough to hold whole turkeys at a helping, plates and dishes to hold the food of the gods. And for the decoration of the home they made enormous things, which I can only describe as being the equivalent of the eighteenth-century decorative urn made to stand in some corner or grace the centrepiece of sideboard or table. These huge things, some three feet high, are elaborately wrought and decorated, iridescent growths of glass ornaments in all colours, including gold—useless, grand affairs, nightmare glassware, that must have been the terror and pride of Italian households. Gaiety and idiocy took over by turns, but always pleasantly. One is never revolted as by the products displayed at the same period in the Crystal Palace; there is nothing serious about these things, they are all rather charming and exhilarating, for glass, mercifully, always remains the master of the craftsman. Their sole purpose was to impress and to impart splendour to an already exuberant age. Sometimes the craftsmen became conjurers, as it were. They performed a trick which could be repeated only once, which astonished, and then stood still, as in those examples of tiers of delicate bowls, which are held one above the other on the thinnest corkscrews of glass. The bottom dish acted as the base, and then, suddenly, another would arise, and another and another and another, and finally a delicate little vase would perch on top, for all the world like a troupe of acrobats standing on each other's shoulders with a little girl on the summit. Also there were plates and dishes inlaid with a hundred portraits, lustre glass bowls with medallions of religious subjects stamped in them, and glass mosaics of fantastic and pointless workmanship. There were even suites of furniture, of gilded wood inlaid with sheets of glass in imitation of *lapis lazuli*, while the church once more came in for its share and used glass altar furniture, concentrating on elaborate late rococo tabernacles and crosses of engraved mirror glass, most of which are rather pleasing, as glass and rococo go well together.

Finally, what can I say of the glass being made in Murano in our own century? Alas, very little. It is best left alone. The blowers are blowing, the pinchers and twisters are performing for tourists. They are turning out the *twee* and the *kitsch* by the thousand pieces. The shops of Venice will give you indication enough—the red, the white, the gold and silver glassware, either hideously “modern” or, mostly, pseudo-classical in design, the little animals, taking their

cue from the cartoon films, and all those scores of hybrid applications to modern uses. The traditions and tricks of a craft which is two thousand years old die very hard, and most of the traditions of Murano glass have been good ones in spite of the bizarre changes of taste down the centuries. But compared with the examples to be seen in the Museum at Murano, the products of our period are the very worst. Technically the craft is as alive as ever and nothing seems to have been forgotten. The repetition of the old movements, the manipulation of the simple tools, handed down from generation to generation of craftsmen on the Island, are as skilful and as astonishing as ever. The last outburst, that magnificent spasm of the nineteenth century, seems to have exhausted the powers of invention completely, and on the whole all they are doing is to repeat some of the lesser achievements of that time, but with even less taste than their great-grandfathers showed. It is somewhat sad to go round the factories and see the fine workmen turning out such poor work, most of them lineal descendants, according to the Golden Book of Murano, of those people who created such miracles in the sixteenth century. The industry is not dead, and skill there is in plenty, but taste and purpose are lacking. Today I went to visit a glass engraver, an extremely skilful young man in his early twenties. His workshop was full of glittering fragments of glass, engraved or waiting to be engraved. The ceiling was hung with electroliers, drooping like huge, tired arum lilies, and the walls were lined with mirrors reflecting the bright glitter of the glass and the quiet canal outside his door. But on his wheel he was engraving a set of pseudo-eighteenth-century designs on a mirror, of swags of flowers and fruits, ladies and gentlemen in crinolines and knee breeches. It was a joy to watch him work with such assurance and precision, but it was sad to see him merely polish up the stocking leg of a periwigged dandy of two hundred years ago or trace the embroidery on the bodice of a crinolined lady. The finished panels of engraved mirror were being screwed down on to square, "modernistic" furniture, and standing around the shop were tables and sideboards, cocktail and radio cabinets, each covered with the design of the crinolined lady and simpering gentleman, repeated time after time. I have been told that there are examples of good modern glass in Venice, and though I haven't seen any, I am sure there must be. Meanwhile, I am also told that Murano is making a lot of very efficient glass for use in chemical laboratories.



ATTENZIONE  
E PROIBITO ENTRARE QUANDO

## *Giudecca*

THE chief charm of the Giudecca is that it does not set out to please the visitor. It is a narrow series of islands, half of which are overcrowded with old and slummy buildings and a tumultuous waterfront, while the other half are taken up by private gardens where nobody is allowed to wander. Thus the only chance that Venice has to look out to the open and empty sea is denied to her—apart from the Lido, where the sea is full of people swimming about. It is doubtful, however, if the Adriatic is any more attractive to look at than any other sea, and I for one would much prefer to turn my back on it and gaze at the busy Giudecca Canal with the Zattere on the other side. (Does this not also, in a sense, show how the Venetians, when they developed these islands, seized on the chance of isolating themselves from the outside world, by building an arrangement of quaysides, small squares and the Piazza San Marco so that at all times they gazed upon themselves, not so much out of deliberate egotism but out of a sheer delight in their own very human affairs? It is this sense of enclosure, of easy inward-gazing, that makes Venice so friendly, a quality possessed by many villages and small towns which have had to face a hostile world—though Venice hasn't ever had to enclose herself with walls, as the sea has been a most efficient moat, and all her gateways to the outer world have been permanently flooded.)

The Giudecca, however, has always been a little too far from the centre to merit any grandiose developments, though at one time it was a fashionable resort of the nobles. Today, like most of the extremities of Venice, it has been allowed to decay and is largely a slum, where the majority of people who have the misfortune to live there drag out an existence of "picturesque" squalor that I find neither attractive nor admirable. (I do not subscribe to the idea that people are more worthwhile, or better to draw and paint, because they live in a slum. Slums usually denote a part of a town in decay, and the one thing that can be said for the unfortunate inhabitants, who are certainly not there from choice—but who

sometimes resent being moved!—is that, having no appearances to maintain, they are less repressed and achieve an apparently more rumbustious form of life, or, being occupied in various forms of manual labour, which are often quiet æsthetically pleasing in themselves, they seem to be more “virile” than the mental worker. . . . So extreme has this attitude become on occasion that I remember a certain school of art in England where the students were sent out to scour the streets for the most decrepit and dirty workmen they could find, because, they, according to the art master, “were more full of character that way.” We must assume, therefore, that clean people are insipid!) The inhabitants of the Giudecca are mainly dockers and people who work in the Port of Venice; and, like dock-land communities the world over, they possess both the virility and scenic possibilities that all people have who are in any way connected with boats. Mercifully, they have more to do with loading and unloading than with fishing, and the Giudecca is spared that overpowering stench which is ubiquitous in Chioggia. There are, however, the same glimpses to be had down back alleys draped with washing and crawling with animals and children, the peeling walls and heaps of rubbish, the crowded, insanitary conditions, the same mobs of urchins everywhere, mothers with arms akimbo and fathers tipped back, taking the sun, against the outer walls on their wooden chairs. . . . The cloisters of San Cosimo are now used as a vast back-yard for drying washing, while the monastery buildings have been converted into tenements, the once placid corridors festooned with a muddle of electric wires, with gas-meters arranged among the wall plaques and living-rooms built among the stately columns of the refectory. . . .

Along the waterfront are the crowded fruit and vegetable stalls, the shops selling goods at half the price they are in Venice, long, low bars and *trattorie*, noisy and full of life, with glimpses through them into green back gardens on the seaward side. All day long upon the quayside—which for most of the day is in the shade—boats are unloading their cargoes, of flour, coal, lime, wood and other things being brought into the storehouses of the Giudecca. It is now possible to move in a scene more reminiscent of Guardi, with his rags blowing in the wind from poles, torn sails and toiling labourers, than of Canaletto, who preferred the plumes, finery and gentilities of the Grand Canal. . . . Sailors stretch out among the fruit in the barges under ragged awnings, fish-wives ply their knives and rattle among



the shells, the fruit-sellers clang the pans of their weighing scales, while at intervals, along the whole front, groups of workmen, white with flour or black with coal, hand over their sacks or wheel their barrow-loads across the quayside and disappear into the warehouses. At the far end, among the big cargo ships, a man is smoothing the mainmast of a sailing ship, littering the ground with shavings; others are sitting in the shade mending sails. . . .

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VISITORS to the Giudecca are as welcome as anywhere else in Venice though no allowances are made: we must take the people as we find them. There is a *trattoria* where I have been several times which, though rough and hardly ever ready, provides both good food and good company. The *padrone* is always served with patriarchal pomp, and during his meal he keeps jumping up to pay personal calls on me to make enquiries about the food, to rearrange the pot of black pepper, smooth out the salt, replenish the tooth-picks. . . . Today, while I have been writing part of this upon his paper tablecloth, he was having lunch with a newly bereaved relative, who had a black tab on his lapel, and a six-year-old daughter. There was endless chatter in dialect, which I couldn't follow, during which the wan little daughter kept gazing at a photograph of her dead mother in her bridal dress. They were joined halfway through by the butcher, his apron covered with blood, who had, as well, a newly cut finger which he sucked continually, and a woman who spent a considerable time sticking cardboard soles into her shoes because they had rubbed her heels sore. A few tables away sat an old man talking to himself dementedly as he picked up a small heap of ragged paper money and then dropped it, several times, in despair. At first he added it up to two hundred and thirty lire, but as his soliloquy developed he was able to make it into five thousand. On the floor, among the litter of paper, a thin cat played; sailors were at the bar by the door, others asleep, their heads upon the tables. . . . The food, which is almost too ample, comes through a large hatch with a bang and is brought to table by a stout and homely matron . . . and, too, like most things here, it is half the price it is across the water.

After lunch, as I wandered around the back streets and in the bit of spare ground near the Corte Grande, I found a homemade fair with a row of swings, built in a rather personal baroque style in

which electric light bulbs and striped amplifiers played a great part. I fell to talking with the little man who had made it, who was in his vest and carried two babies. He was only too pleased to show me around his quite elaborate creation. It had many oddly proportioned statues, reminiscent of figureheads, holding clusters of electric light bulbs like flowers, with paintings of Venice upon the swing-boats in that universal amateur style popularized by the Douanier Rousseau, and gaily painted animal heads and bits of scroll work. The whole thing had the same charm as the cork-work cathedrals of Brighton and those odd palaces of shells and broken crockery made by French postmen at the weekends. . . .

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UPON this narrow string of islands, among these lively scenes, is one of the chief ornaments of Venetian architecture, the Church of Il Redentore, somewhat isolated, standing like a strict, sober and clean-featured dominie among a crowd of urchins. It was started in 1577 and finished in 1592, by Palladio, as a thank-offering for the cessation of the Great Plague of 1575 (when fifty thousand people perished in Venice, including Titian, who had already reached the age of ninety-nine). It belongs to the Capuchins, who were a young order at the time of building; and though it may be due to the fact that it has but recently been cleaned inside, it still looks astonishingly new and has about it a lingering air of the brisk efficiency of the Counter-Reformation. In this respect the architect was well chosen, though Palladio, who brought to life classical architecture more faithfully than any other architect, is about the last person I would associate with Christianity. How cunningly he used the excuse of a Christian church to build a pagan temple! It seems to me to be an architecture of pure learning, of absolute reasonableness. It has none of the dark oriental sensuousness of St. Mark's, none of the youthful elegance—the almost callow beauty—of the fifteenth-century churches of Venice, or the theatrical and hysterical qualities of the baroque churches. Il Redentore is calm and exquisite—almost appallingly beautiful. . . .

Canova's smooth sculptures—though they are on a very much lower æsthetic plane—would be much more suitable than the poor baroque altarpiece here at the moment, though that might fit elsewhere with ease. The modern sentimental statues are extraordinarily pathetic; in fact, hardly anything will fit into Palladio's scheme:

it is a building which should remain for ever empty, to be admired for itself alone. Even the people coming into this church seem out of place: so untidy, so human, so imperfect they seem, while the tonsured monks, with their extremely long beards and brown frocks stirring in the wind as they scurry by, look quite bizarre—no less absurd than priests from any alien religion would have looked if they had entered a Greek or Roman temple. What ever this building could be used for I don't know, but it is certainly not a church: no human institution seems worthy of its cold beauty. It seems to be almost a case where art has outgrown its function, where a final perfect statement in architectural terms has been made which far outstrips its earthly use, a statement of icy purity, remote as the tops of the Alps, and with as little relation to everyday life. Whatever else the Roman Church might be, it is exceedingly human. Its churches are the dream houses of the people, a dream of extraordinary complication and beauty which has recurred down the centuries, and people have entered these buildings generation after generation to repeat the same comforting formulæ. In spite of the more exotic flights of fancy of mystics and saints, the churches have always belonged to the people. Building, sculpture and painting, in the last analysis, are physical acts, and the churches were made by stonemasons, painters, carvers and gilders. Byzantine churches were an artistic melting-pot, a kind of Middle-Eastern bazaar of religious art, very earthy and noisy, and, in the latter days, whatever the Baroque achieved of sophistication, it still remained astonishingly human, a kind of bombastic religious jest. But Palladio soars away from all this lowly imagining into intellectual perfection: his is the ancient dream of classical revival come true. . . . No architect perhaps has ever had such an exquisite sense of form and line, such a right grasp of spaces and solids. . . . And what is more surprising, though his work is perfect it is intensely alive. It is purged of dross, of all impure thoughts, it is as majestic as anything ever made by man, but we can no longer worship there; all we can do is admire—our eyes shaded from the glory.

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THE Capuchins, dear human people, as though in violent reaction to the artistic purity of their church, have nevertheless had an orgy in their private rooms behind the high altar, away from public view. They have made, in their sacristy, a chamber of horrors

almost equal to their famous grotto of skeletons and mummies in Rome. They bring us back from all the light and purity, the Olympian calm, back to the dark side of life with a bump. With all the pleasures of morbidity, in a room no bigger than a fair-sized drawing-room, with the sunlight streaming in, are displayed on shelves all round the room the severed heads of twelve saints, in glass cases, domed like those used for holding stuffed birds on Victorian mantelpieces. The illusion is very convincing until we find that the heads are made of wax, full size, of astonishingly realistic workmanship, with glass eyes, rolling upwards, this way and that, gazing into some heaven beyond the ceiling. Those by the windows are lit by the sun, which shines through the wax, lending them an unearthly radiance. Their beards, which are real beards, must have been taken, in all their grisly glory, from the sacrificial chins of eleven old men—long grey beards applied to the soft wax with loving care and now crushed up against the glass. The hair too, stuck on to half-bald heads, must have been sacrificed by somebody. . . . Each head, parting waxy lips to reveal stumps of dull, dry teeth, has the remains of a brown habit crumpled around the neck, and so these gentlemen, under their domes of glass, each lost in his embarrassing private ecstasy and cramped in his dome of prejudice, are examples of saintly countenances for all the world to see. In their company is the model head of St. Veronica in a cowl, grimacing from her corner, disfigured by a skin rash.

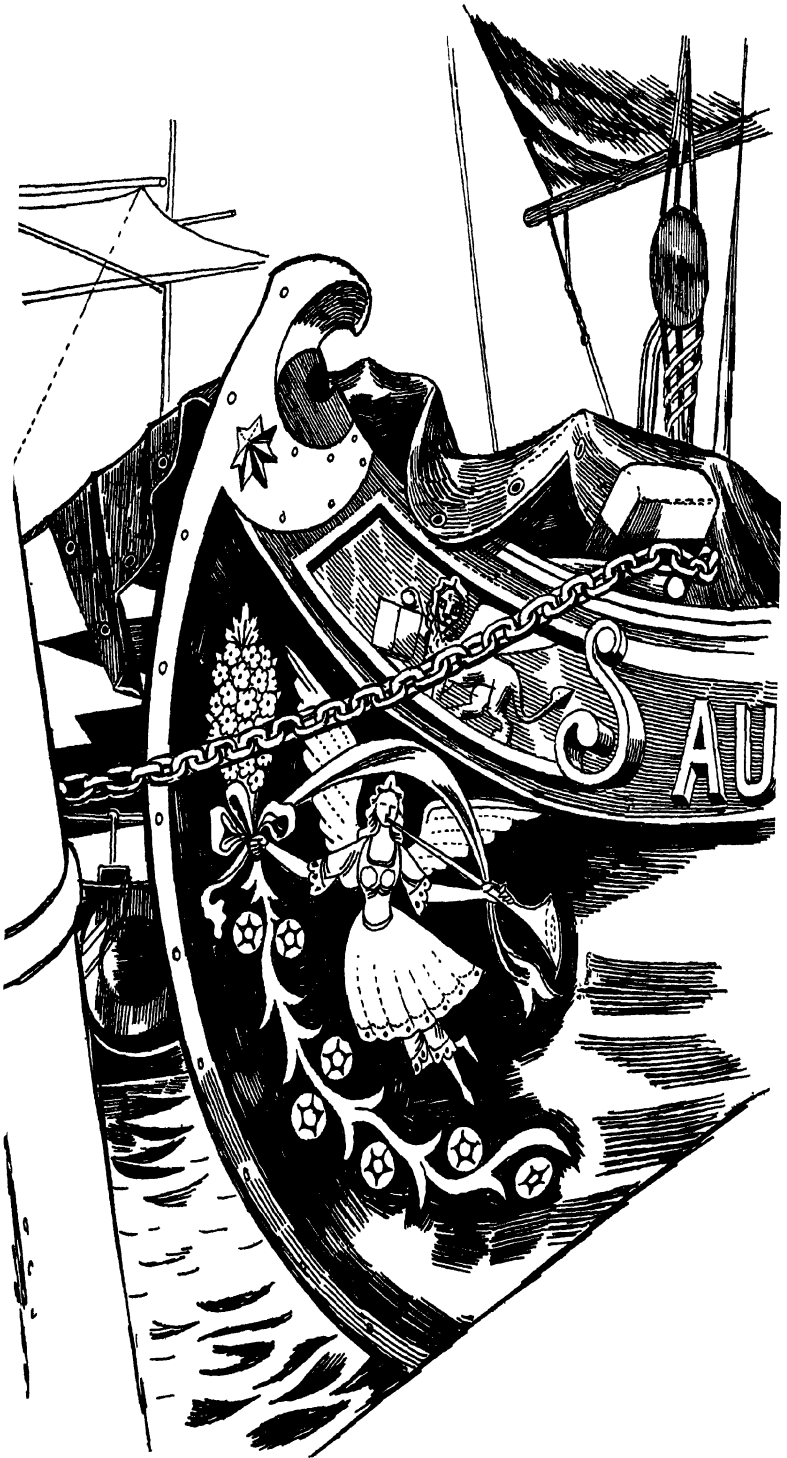
Halfway along one wall is an ornate gilt-and-white paper reliquary in that favourite shape, a sarcophagus with a window in its side. This holds the homespun brown mantle of San Lorenzo, bedecked now with a cheerful garland of paper flowers. There are other, more happy exhibits—two playful baroque reliquaries, made in an idle hour by an artist of no mean accomplishments—possibly a theatrical designer—to house a few bones; a model of a *Bleeding Christ* in wax about one foot six inches long; the shoe of a saint from Milan; and a charming wax model of a *Flight into Egypt* with a smiling mule. Of greater value artistically is a fine small crucifix in wood, the feet resting on a cushion of bleached coral—a nice Venetian touch—surrounded by the Evangelists, delicately modelled in wax. Above this display are paintings—a *Baptism* by Veronese, four small panels by Bassano, a *Vivarini Madonna and Child with Saints* kept in a cupboard, and sundry paintings of the School of Bellini.

## GIUDECCA

This sacristy, curiously cheerful in spite of its rather grisly exhibits, is used as a passageway to other parts of the building, but the living Capuchins, who rush diagonally across the room from door to door, apparently in a hurry, do not bear the slightest resemblance to their archetypes under the glass domes, but look as healthy as the butchers and stevedores on the Giudecca waterfront. Children, too, seem to use this room as a passageway on their way to their schoolroom, passing through with as much equanimity as children do through the biology room with its specimens in formalin on the window sills. . . . A Capuchin entered with a suitcase, followed by a youth with a long ladder. . . . I felt that I was not there at all, standing like a ghost in the corner with St. Veronica peering over my shoulder.



## PART FOUR





## *Le Zattere*

I HAVE crossed over the Grand Canal to live by the Salute. . . . Every morning upon my ceiling are the wriggling reflections from the canal below, and apart from the proximity of a new set of church bells—so near that I feel almost to be sleeping in the belfry—it is very much quieter here and a great contrast to the noise that I both suffered and enjoyed while living near the Piazza. . . . I swing open the shutters one by one, and there, opposite, are the giant convolutions of the Salute, the steep domes, the population of statues. The architecture of the transept is severe and bold; the pavements are grass-grown; the side door is occasionally used by priests, coming and going with their briefcases. It has about it the air of a stage door. . . . In the canal below, gondoliers clean the sumptuous fittings of the private gondolas—magnificent black boats with shining brasses and bold heraldic colours upon the oars, colours which later in the day will be repeated upon the liveries, in the broad sashes, hat bands and rows of brass buttons. There is a bumping of wood on wood and the swish of water. . . . Further along the canal other boatmen tinker with the private motor launches, less ugly than motor cars, twice as wide as gondolas: red against the green water. Rainbow colours spread around them on the surface of the canal; there is a whiff of petrol and an occasional angry snort from the engines. . . .

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THE Giudecca Canal on a fine August morning before the sun gets too scorching is a scene of great activity. In the background are the long, sprawling buildings of the waterfront with the quiet dome of the Redentore rising above, while to the right are the wharves with the ocean-going ships, which appear to list slightly to one side in the morning haze. The wide canal is busy with boats carrying heavy loads, moving low upon the water. On the Zattere workmen have been unloading wood from a great barge for the last three days—a sailing boat in ultramarine, with red sails and awnings, and

gamboge eyes painted upon the prow. Amid a general colour of red rust, barefoot and naked to the waist, cloths round their heads, they wheel barrow-loads of logs down the plank and into the storehouse. Close by is moored one of the gay fishing boats from Chioggia, with an angel garlanded with roses painted upon the pitch-black ground, and on the prow a cap of polished brass, embossed with large eight-pointed stars. The red sails hang limply by the mast, and the fisherman lies upon his back under an awning of ochre and pink stripes watching the others unload the wood. . . . Then past the bathing-pool—a large box full of clean sea—in which, by the sound of it, a whole school of children are bathing like porpoises; and over the small bridge in full view of the house where Ruskin stayed, around which lingers a vicarage air, where the present-day English visitors live in a cultural outpost, protected by a plaque on the front of the house, a talisman against change.

Titanus the Tug, in black and red stripes, with smoke curling from his funnel, dashes by among the small craft on the way to another heavy task. The olive-oil boats come into the quayside and disturb the cigar-coloured boys at their fishing. Loaded with vegetables from the markets, the housewives stand in the crowded ferry boat on their way back to the Giudecca. . . . A graceful schooner passes by and in the opposite direction come oarsmen out for a practice, while back and forth in an endless stream the boats loaded with boxes, mattresses, piles of furniture, sand and cement are pushed along at snail's pace by sweating oarsmen. . . . As if in triumph, the efficient motor-driven Coca-cola barge rides by, full of glittering empty bottles—the attendants' uniforms, the boat and all the fittings a bright orange, with the well-known straggle of debased lettering upon its side for all to see.

Around the news-stand loafers are gazing at the magazine covers without buying. A group of youth-hostellers, sleepy-eyed and burdened, have just come over from the Casa San Giorgio: English boys with shorts down to their knees, looking at a map of the labyrinth to plot their way back to the station. At the café tables, built out on rafts into the canal, knots of students are poring over their books in the shade of gaudy umbrellas, and the ubiquitous loungers, in fine shirts, pressed trousers and milk-chocolate shoes, gossip in the sun—the tedious sunshine of unemployment. They glance at their fingernails, adjust their hair or make early morning overtures to the cluster of young girls, who admire themselves in their first

grown-up dresses and unselfconsciously run their hands up and down their own figures. . . . The baker's boy passes by, balancing his tray upon a cloth ring which pushes his hair down over his eyes. The postman comes to empty the letter-box; the tobacconist does a brisk trade; a wireless plays in an empty bar while the chromium is wiped over. . . .

\* \* \*

HERE I have lingered a whole morning over breakfast, shifting about lazily under an umbrella, hiding behind my sun glasses, chuckling at the delightful thought of anonymity. . . . One starts out with a firm intention to go somewhere, but so distracting is Venice that one usually finishes up somewhere else. . . . I have never known a place more suited to aimlessness: as though drugged, one browses the hours away doing nothing, or else, once the wandering starts, one staggers on for a whole day light-headed with hunger. . . .

It is too late now to alter the pattern of my life here, to think of doing all the things I have left undone. The last few weeks are for picking up loose ends . . . piece by piece the picture of Venice comes together. But it could go on for ever: eventually one would have to become a Venetian. . . . Knowing that time is running short, one snatches more at pleasure: one's judgments become more personal, perhaps more fleeting. A strain of melancholy runs through everything. Friends and acquaintances leave one by one. . . . The Zattere is the best place in which to finish up a summer in Venice; the best places for wandering are the streets and squares behind. . . . But like a game, they all finish up at the Scalzi Bridge—and then at the Station just beyond.



### Fragments: Three

GIAMBATTISTA TIEPOLO'S rendering of physical beauty is remarkable. His types are haughty, but that is as near as they approach to idealism. He got closer than most artists to the purely sensuous without losing his dignity as a painter. I am frankly fond of Tiepolo's faces because they are attractive, but they make bad nuns. . . . In *The Madonna with St. Clara and Two Dominican Nuns* in Santa Maria Rosario the faces are not merely pleasing but erotic as well, as though each had spent hours in a beauty parlour instead of years of soul-searching and midnight vigils. His women are nearer carnal than heavenly delights: such ladies would never cloister themselves away from the world. Sometimes his use of physical beauty is appropriate. In the painting of *The Virgin in Glory Appearing to the Blessed Simon Stock* in the Scuola dei Carmini the element of motherhood is expressed with restraint, refinement and real feeling. (The Simon Stock part of the painting—of the saint grovelling in a grave—is as tiresome as it is gruesome, though the tale must be told. . . .) On the same ceiling are Faith, Hope, Charity, Prudence, Innocence and Grace—a perfect *chorus* of virtues. . . . Yet again, the figure of the Bimbo in the *Adoration* in the Sacristy of San Marco is really one of the most successful naturalistic paintings of a baby I have ever seen. Extraordinarily tender painting.

Only his greatness saved him from sentimentalism.

As Ruskin noted, there are many heads of *executed* giants hanging about Venice, but I have so far only seen six *whole* ones: the two of bronze on the Clock Tower in the Piazza, and the four on the monument of Doge Giovanni Pesaro in the Frari. They are next to Canova's monument, but his figures look effeminate when compared with these monstrous Negroes. The figure of the little Doge sits startled upon his sarcophagus, which rests on the backs of two more of those baroque animals crossed between lions, camels and sea cows. The Negroes act as supporters, carrying the weight on their

shoulders protected by cushions. But they writhe under it, expressing great pain upon their brutish faces. They are curiously dressed in flowing, ragged clothing of white marble, through which their flesh, of black marble, shows at the knees. Over their shoulders are flung ragged-edged cloaks, and they have striped trousers. They must be some of the earliest sculptures to wear trousers: perfect pantomime giants. . . . Between each pair of giants rises a hideous figure sculptured in the full enjoyment of realism—two corpses of black marble, sightless mummies shrivelled almost down to the skeletons, each holding a sheet of white marble on which are inscribed the deeds of the Doge.

I HAVE reached the conclusion that Canova was a traitor to Venetian art. . . . Nor has Venice forgotten this, for his monument in the Frari is the most tragical and the most comical in the whole of the city. It is a subtle, if unconscious, revenge. . . . We have noted Canova's smooth limbs in St. Peter's, Rome. . . . Well, here the technique is repeated, though not so highly polished. The tomb—which he originally designed for Titian, who sleeps opposite, but which was mercifully reserved for himself—is in the form of a pyramid with an open door. A figure in deepest, deepest mourning slowly drifts up the steps, followed by a small procession—three semi-naked boys carrying flambeaux and two large ladies carrying a garland of roses. On the opposite side of the door is the Lion of St. Mark and a figure of Fame. The Lion rests its head upon its paws and the closed book, with an expression of utter dejection upon its face. It is definitely the most woebegone lion in all art. . . . The open door of the tomb—which incidentally only contains Canova's heart—is for some reason covered with wire netting. Possibly to keep out tourists. . . . It is a bleached and sombre joke.

FOR those in pursuit of the personality of John the Baptist Venice is particularly rich. There are two by the Vivarini in the Accademia—the one by Bartelomeo is one of the most rarefied figures in the whole collection. But the most startling of all is Donatello's austere and elongated wood-carving in the Frari. In spite of its small size, this figure is utterly compelling. For me the face threatens all the

horrors of sudden conversion; it is trance-like and exalted. Such a man one might have found wandering among the blackthorns in medieval times. . . . John the Baptist is a most fascinating and enigmatic personality: often of greater psychological importance than some of his renderings in art would suggest.

SINGLE figures abound: hero Sebastian, Lorenzo grilled, and others. . . . What square, firm, vacant faces Giovanni Bellini painted: solid-muscled figures in niches of gold. . . . But San Rocco is my favourite! A fine one in the Accademia by Andrea da Murano, another by Mansueti (though none so fine as Crivelli's small figure in the Wallace Collection!). A pensive young man, a type of prodigal, a vagabond, discovered as the long-lost son—he always stands revealing a wound in his thigh, with stocking down over his boot, holding staff, bowl, hat and rosary. Sometimes he has a dog. . . . Venice claims to have his body in the Church of San Rocco—but so do many other places, whole or in parts. . . . He may have had a boil on his leg, for he was said to be efficacious against the plague. . . .

CHINOISERIE found its greatest expression in furniture, textiles, wallpapers, pottery, lacquer objects. . . . Few full-scale buildings have been erected in the style. (Brighton Pavilion is perhaps the largest example, and that is not wholly Chinese.) Yet the style is basically architectural in inspiration, for what is a four-poster bed but a garden pavilion moved indoors? The chairs, tables, commodes, mirrors are really all outdoor objects—garden furniture overgrown with weeds and flowers, sometimes grotto-furniture made up of small rocks and stones. . . . Summerland furniture. . . . But I think it is more than merely furniture-art: it is really the final dreamlet of the Renaissance, twitching, ineffectual. It is fairy-tale Renaissance, a decorative dream that has lingered on from the indigestion of the Baroque. Though in the main it takes on universal characteristics, Venetian Chinoiserie has many of its own: especially its colour. The lagoon landscapes, as might be imagined, were particularly adaptable to the style: we visit little islands in gondola-junks to find exotic plants on a spiky land, where the objects of the foreshore look like fragments of past Venetian styles water-washed and wind-

### FRAGMENTS: THREE

blown. Acanthus, so fulsome in the Baroque, has become a dry shore weed growing among the stones. There are small pavilions distinctly reminiscent of Venetian Gothic; rags still blow on poles. People, when they appear, are really Venetians dressed as fantasy Chinese; the animals those weird pseudo-camels of the Baroque; and the birds are Venetian caged-birds let loose. . . . All in lacquer, too, a dreamy medium.

IN the small painting by Longhi in the Accademia there is a party of men in brocaded gowns and embroidered waistcoats idling away an afternoon. The man in the centre wears ear-rings. They are playing violins, and their music-sheets are scattered upon an Indian table-cloth and upon the floor. In front of the table is a stool on which sits a small white dog looking up at her master. She is no more than nine inches long and has two small teats hanging down. . . . In the background a card game is in progress, but the players are not beaux but clerics, a fat monk in white and a priest in skull-cap. Behind them stands a young man with a monocle. . . . Monocle, toy-dog, ear-rings, embroidery and violins. . . . Unlike Pompeii, which was smothered in hot ashes, Venice languished and faded out on the note of a violin.





## *Campo Santa Margarita*

I CAME out this morning with the full intention of looking again at the Tiepolo paintings in the Scuola dei Carmini, but I failed to get farther than the Campo Santa Margarita, unable, as usual, to resist a market. And here I have been all day. . . . What a lively square this is! Not a tourist in sight (and I am invisible to myself except in rather disappointing reflections in shop windows). One realizes how much of Venice there is to know near to leaving, but I can never rush around like a one-man conducted tour: I must take my Venice slowly week by week. I know I shall go away having missed half of what the guide-books say it is good for me to see, but I know I shall have stumbled upon many odd things that are never mentioned there. Rebelling against their authority, I find I take an almost perverse interest in trivialities as well as in the grand and famous things, and to spite the guide-book I will spend hours among the fruit stalls within a few hundred yards of masterpieces: I have taken a keen delight in not entering the Palazzo Ducale this summer. . . . The reality of Venice is for ever elusive, but it is to be found in the back alley and the side canal as well as in the grand places. It is hidden away somewhere in this teeming, noisy labyrinth.

What odd thought has been haunting me all morning in the Campo Santa Margarita? I did not realize until mid-afternoon that this square reminds me of Leyburn Market in Wensleydale. But there is nothing green here, except the vegetables—no trees, or surrounding green hills. Only the shape is the same, little else. But even in the midst of all this noisy reality Venice makes one dream. Pictures come floating by, periods mix, like passing one hand behind the other: how one began, what one has become. . . . But oh, the easy charm of Venice! These sentimental tunes coming from the cafés and wine shops all day long, the everlasting sunshine, the fantasy, the decrepitude, the colours . . . all this ripe fruit and banks of gladioli! . . . Piles of fat green melons with red flesh inside, crescent moons of coconut lying on vine leaves, with little fountains playing on them. . . . This endless parade of people, and, above all, the friendliness, the *accessibility* of Venice.



## Trio

THREATS of farewells come crowding in, but the three of us spend our days as though our life here were permanent. Sun-drenched mornings on the Zattere, wandering all over Venice from midday onwards, a leisurely perambulation from one dark wine cellar to another. . . . There is always an inner room, shaded from the bright sunshine, full of happy people, tipsy groups of musicians and singers shouting at the tops of their voices, charming each other with guitar and floods of song. This is where the odd characters gather: the Carnival still goes on, away from the hotel lounges. Never a sensible word is spoken between us: we have said nothing of any importance for a week. We go in and out of shops buying unnecessary things; I have signed my name upon postcards to my friends' relatives in all parts of Italy. Salutations to everybody! In and out the arcades, in and out famous buildings. This is the way to go sightseeing. . . . Around and about for hours until it is evening and time to go to that grape-hung *giardino* to eat. . . .

\* \* \*

THERE is a ceiling of vines, with black and green grapes against the night sky. Around the garden walls, which are painted viridian, are pots of ferns on brackets with artificial flowers stuck into them. There is an underworld of cats, and caged birds by the kitchen door, and somewhere a wireless in the inner rooms where the young men of the district are noisily playing cards. Down the centre of the garden—which consists only of vines and paper flowers—a long table has been arranged to take a party of forty-five peasants down from the mountains, a double row of mixed families, young and old, dressed in black, with weatherbeaten faces. Their priest is here with them, like a shepherd, sitting with the grandfathers. Children and babies are at side tables with their mothers, while among them are tables for the boatmen from the Zattere, bare-footed, brown, alert. . . . The meal progresses, splendid and boisterous, and the whole garden seems to bounce with noise. After the

eating and drinking they burst out into high-pitched mountain songs, and the grapes almost fall from the ceiling with joy. One of the boatmen rises and, standing by the kitchen door, surrounded by the *padrone's* family, sings an excerpt from *Rigoletto*, to the accompaniment of a dwarf who dances in front of him making loud miaows. . . .

\* \* \*

OUT we go along the canal, across the Ponte San Cristoforo, among the narrow, tree-hung alleys by the British Consulate, to buy peaches to eat on our way to the Accademia Bridge. Giovanni starts his nightly diatribe against the English, a nimble satire with actions, always ending with a list of the world's languages. He starts with Italian as being the most melodious, then German, which he apparently thinks is beautiful, then French, Spanish and Portuguese; a lesser group of mid-European languages and odd Slav groups I have never heard of. Then the noise of a machine tool factory and the noise of cleaning the streets with a snow shovel, and finally English. . . . Having thus relieved his feelings, we find ourselves in a secondhand furniture shop, where we select odd pieces of scrap iron, broken pottery and glassware, enormous sideboards and old spring mattresses as hypothetical presents for our friends. . . . Over the Grand Canal to the Campo San Stefano to visit a haunt or two, where we develop a craving for water melon. In a back alley we meet two cheeky urchins, a girl and a boy, but we threaten to throw them into a canal when they start to rifle our pockets. They score again by sending us down a cul-de-sac, and run away laughing in the opposite direction. . . . Standing upon a bridge, we see the nightly flotilla of gondolas approaching, lantern trimmed, crowded with gregarious each-other-loving Americans of all ages, the young, the fattish and the very fat, gliding along the well-known romantic route. In one gondola is the little orchestra, one accordion, one violin and one tenor, who has a fine voice but a bald head, singing *Sole Mio*. The occupants of the gondolas *clap* after each song. . . . A gondolier winks at us as he passes under the bridge. . . .

For a while we watch the lottery in the Campo Santi Apostoli. But it is long drawn out and tedious and we are much more pleased to elbow our way into the crowd to watch the man who changes pink water into yellow by squeezing lemon into it. Melons we find at last by the Ponte dei Ebrei, large and red, dripping with juice and

TRIO

with pips like beetles. The melon seller entrusts us with his long knife and we eat the enormous half-moons until we can eat no more. . . . In a bar lined with mirrors we see our back views vanishing into infinity. . . . There is dancing by the Scalzi Bridge, and trays of pastries. . . . And then to the Station to look up trains, for Fernando goes tomorrow. . . . The timetables look like frosted glass to me.

\* \* \*

NEXT morning we breakfast quietly on the Zattere, and sit till almost noon in a pleasant trance. We drift through the day feeling friendly towards everybody: Giovanni sails over to the Lido, and I go off with Fernando to help him choose a present for his sister. He has set his heart upon a Venetian chandelier, so we find a crystal cave and tread carefully among the stalactites and stalagmites. . . . I have to bend low to avoid the hanging glassware, but eventually, after much picking and choosing, he finds what he wants. He is very pleased and serious about his purchase, but I cannot imagine an Englishman returning home after a summer holiday with a three-foot chandelier for his sister. . . .

\* \* \*

BY midnight we assemble at the station in hilarious mood, with the fragile present packed in an enormous bolster of cardboard and straw, and then I find myself embroiled in one of those fantastic leave-takings that I have often witnessed with astonishment on Italian stations. Such commotion, such delightful anguish! Embraces and handshakes and such dreadful wavings down the platform! To increase the effect, a heavy thunderstorm comes on and the train departs in flashes of lightning and blinding rain. . . . I felt as though I had been living in an opera for days. . . .

\* \* \*

BUT the night is not ended yet. Giovanni and I make our way along the slippery streets after the storm. . . . We drop into a bar, hungry as well as thirsty, but no sooner settle to eat than a workman enters with stepladder and tools. The place is to be redecorated although it is one o'clock in the morning. . . . The customers shift around from chair to chair as the flakes fall from the ceiling. The workman has a newspaper cap upon his head and a cigarette lolling

from his mouth. He is in his vest and soon becomes covered from head to foot in white powder like a clown. He behaves as though he were alone, folding up his stepladder and re-erecting it in one position after another, and the room is quickly littered with débris. The customers leave one by one, shaking flakes of old whitewash off their clothes. . . .

It is two o'clock when we reach San Stefano. In the church door we fall in with a band of minstrels with a guitar who are singing their hearts out with broad, broad smiles, laughing and capering in the moonlight. . . . It is surprising how many Italian folksongs one knows at two o'clock in the morning. . . . Here at last is a real Harlequinade with all the characters in part, the fat, work-shy musician who is tipsy all the time, the sly merchant with rings upon his fingers, the *bragadoccio*, the know-all, and dancing around the crowd the old man, pathetic and foolish, with high-pitched, croaking voice. . . . For an hour we stay with them, and then leave them, still singing, in the deserted square. We linger for a while on the Accademia Bridge to look at the dark palaces, the empty Grand Canal and the black lapping water. . . . Thence down the tree-lined avenue back to the Zattere. . . . There is nothing but the bobbing boats and the moon.







## *Fragments: Four*

VENICE washed by the sea, flooded with light. . . . Openness—a sense of radiation, of sea access. Yet it is labyrinthine. The narrow alleys and streets produce an intimate atmosphere. There is an unusual homeliness about Venice, and an honesty. But in the late summer, the water lanes become mysterious, shrouded in silvery fog. . . . Hot muffled journeys by water through veils of mist, slowly parting. Gondoliers rising out of the mist, shouting and disappearing; figures hurrying over bridges.

VENETIAN Gothic is Sea Gothic. Originally an architecture of the northern forests which, when it came over the lagoons, became an architecture of the coral pools. It is Gothic washed by the sea, picked clean by fishes, sprouting ornaments like sea-flowers, festooned with seaweeds. Mosaics are like fish-scales; archways take on the flowing double curve of the fish's back; parapets are spiky like white fish-bones; pavements are pebble beaches.

All colours in Venice are sea colours: the colours of sands, wet and dry, the light colours of bleached shells, the iridescent colours of mother-of-pearl. There is a hardness about things Venetian: a love of stones in the sun—of flagstones, balustrades, parapets, mouldings, even roofs and chimneys of stone. The same quality is to be found in rock pools by the sea, with floors of many-coloured pebbles, and ledges, clean and dry in the sun, with fantastic piles of stones and water-washed knobs strewn over them. Only the hard things remain on beaches, only the spiky plants survive. . . . Thus St. Mark's might be an amphibious cathedral. . . . It has a peculiar neptunian quality, and would not look amiss at the bottom of a sunlit lagoon: its domes encrusted by limpets, seaweed flowing from its cornices and parapets, fishes wandering through its glittering mosaic halls, sea-anemones flowering round the doorways, and the atrium washed high with coloured pebbles. . . .

SEASIDE madness—that trance condition induced by beaches, wind-swept, sun-swept—was never very far from the surface of Venetian art, even in the days of the High Renaissance. Then it was swashbuckling. . . . In the days of the Baroque there was an attempt to return to God and His ways, but it was casino-godliness—the holiday spirit was too strong for it; Venetian Baroque was altogether too gay, too sea-infected. So they built Santa Maria della Salute, which is just as capable of being an amphibious palace as St. Mark's.

The sea-motif came to the fore again towards the end, in Venetian Rococo. Its very name implies sea-grottoes, the spiky fantasies of coral clusters, and glimpses into exotic shallows on late summer afternoons, but by this time the pools were littered with fragments of broken golden ornaments and jewellery. . . .

VENICE the spell-binder: using air, water, fire, metals, glass, marbles and precious stones to beguile the senses: to amuse the young, cajole the wary, titilate the weary, upset those who are only too willing to be upset, those who are living on the brink of being submerged, those who dare not admit their weaknesses. Sometimes at night, Venice is like the island of Circe: we walk with masks of animals. . . . Then in the bleak hours of early morning we drag home down some foul alley, lost in a maze of shuttered slums and ruinous palaces. The carnival is over, the brightness gone. It is the hour when the past jostles with the unreality of the present. . . . In Venice one can be supremely happy or live with thoughts of suicide, charmed and fascinated or physically nauseated.

VENICE is a hall of mirrors of the emotions, where feelings swell outwards through luxury and exotism or grow immensely tall and thin through exposure. But there is laughter always about to burst out: rather unreal laughter, sometimes sinister laughter. And then in moods of stillness, when the shudder from the silence of the lagoons takes one unawares, there is a most dreadful sadness about everything, and a terrifying sense of decay.

In the Baroque and Rococo setting of Venice at night I feel that we have come too late. We are seeing Venice after the event. . . . We have arrived two hundred years late for the party. The revellers

have gone, but the scenery of carnival is still standing. They have left, in odd corners, their masks, their cloaks and *tricornes*, their extinguished lanterns in dusty heaps.

THE real Venice? What and where is it? There is nothing left of the old Venice now, only this pleasure resort Venice—where everything is exhibitionism. When we built our piers out into the sea, with their peep-shows, orchestras and mad amusement arcades, though we did not know it, we were constructing miniatures of Venice. . . . But wait, at night, when the moon shines over the lagoons and lovers stand on the bridges, the quiet breath of the sea can be felt. The bells of the Basilica sound within their spiky marble box, black with Byzantine secrecy, the Giants knock away the hours on their huge bronze bell and the pigeons sleep. That is one aspect of Venice that persists down the centuries from one generation of holiday-makers to the next.

Historical events jostle each other noiselessly in painted chambers. . . . There are reflections of ghosts in the mirrors, for ever multiplying human follies in all directions, far away into darkness.

WE accept all things in Venice as *events*, as things in themselves. Thus all events here are strangely pointed and contemporary. The immediate moment is of extreme importance in spite of its acute historical setting. (But there are undertones of absurdity, remote fear and decay, that are always disquieting.) The only people who see things at all in perspective, I am sure, are Venetians born and bred: the rest of us are uncouth strangers.

VENICE is the place for all who love themselves, for here the self is exaggerated, blown up—idealized and scandalized at the same time. Each one of us unconsciously slips into one of the character parts of the *Commedia dell'Arte*.

We perpetually struggle to know the "reality" of Venice. But in the end we come to know that we bring our own Venice with us. Rather shyly it unfolds, week by week, then it blossoms quite suddenly. Yet to be capable of such blossoming, after so many years

## THE LION AND THE PEACOCK

of grubbing on one's self-made heap of rubbish—that is the whole joy of coming to Venice. It is the visitors' privilege to be taken in, though the Venetians may smile cynically and think us fools; but in being taken in we often reveal our true selves. If a man cannot find himself here he is lost for ever. Venice brings out degrees of honesty in most personalities.

MARIESCHI's prophecy has still to come true. The final dream is of Venice in ruins. One day it must go and it will be no more than the dead cities of Ancient Rome: rubble heaps, weeds, lizards, water-fowl and butterflies . . . the canals choked and stagnant. . . .

## *Festa della Luce*

QUICKLY now the time runs out. Though I shall stay another week I know I shall dream the days away, and be on the Channel boat before I awake. And tomorrow Giovanni goes. The summer is slipping by. . . . Tonight is the Festa della Luce, but I feel that I have had my fill of spectacles for one year, so I do not approach it in the best of spirits. . . . There are great crowds at the Rialto, with lights everywhere. Yellow lanterns are strung like beads on both sides of the Grand Canal, and we have just time to get aboard a barge before the waterway becomes impassable. The houses and palaces on either side resemble the bright distemper scenery at a pantomime and people crowd every window and balcony. . . . The procession of boats passes slowly under the Rialto Bridge, hung as it were with incandescent fruit and vegetables. . . . Then comes the great moment when the *Galleggiante* moves from beneath the darkened archway. Under the bridge all was in darkness, but when it emerges, *pronto!*—all its lights go up, and from the centre an illuminated dome slowly rises. It is an enormous raft built upon barges, holding a complete orchestra and choir—and innumerable friends and relatives—with arches of lights all round and a dome of lights. . . . After the triumphant entry the music starts, but the noise and excitement from the hundreds of other illuminated boats make it quite inaudible. . . . Behind follows the procession of specially decorated barges. Pride of place is taken by the next largest boat on the Grand Canal, on which is erected a fifteen-foot Coca-cola bottle lit up from the inside. . . . The phosphorescent stream moves slowly on its way to San Marco, and so congested does the Canal become that it would be quite impossible to fall in the water. The boatmen quarrel for right of way: the merry parties sing and drink; for a while all is gaiety in our boat. The illuminated palaces look superb and, in honour of the occasion, allow glimpses of their sumptuous interiors. And then rounding the bend one of our party is sick and has to be put ashore. . . . The *Galleggiante* moves very slowly indeed—leaving the Rialto at nine and reaching San Marco

## THE LION AND THE PEACOCK

at half-past-twelve. The full moon keeps pace, but it becomes very cold upon the water by midnight. . . . By one o'clock I last saw the *Galleggiante* moving out across the Bacino towards the open sea, and as far as my feelings were concerned it could go on and on for ever. . . . Our party dispersed with a shudder, and so to bed.

## Envoi

WE caroused for the last time among the narrow lanes beyond the Salute, over the Accademia Bridge—decorated with festoons of yellow lanterns from the Festa the night before—then along the route up to the station.

Here for the tourist all things end. The journey over the lagoon is the return to the future. . . . Giovanni left at midnight, and we had little time to spare except to say goodbye. . . .

The Grand Canal was deserted on my way back. We were the only boat upon the water. . . . The palaces, the Rialto, the final splendour of the Salute, still hung with lights or floodlit, looked like an empty stage when the play was over.







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