John Ruskin

THE STONES OF VENICE

(Vol. 1-3)

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Volume 1

THE FOUNDATIONS

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PREFACE.

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In the course of arranging the following essay, I put many things aside in my thoughts to be said in the Preface, things which I shall now put aside altogether, and pass by; for when a book has been advertised a year and a half, it seems best to present it with as little preface as possible.

Thus much, however, it is necessary for the reader to know, that, when I planned the work, I had materials by me, collected at different times of sojourn in Venice during the last seventeen years, which it seemed to me might be arranged with little difficulty, and which I believe to be of value as illustrating the history of Southern Gothic. Requiring, however, some clearer assurance respecting certain points of chronology, I went to Venice finally in the autumn of 1849, not doubting but that the dates of the principal edifices of the ancient city were either ascertained, or ascertainable without extraordinary research. To my consternation, I found that the Venetian antiquaries were not agreed within a century as to the date of the building of the façades of the Ducal Palace, and that nothing was known of any other civil edifice of the early city, except that at some time or other it had been fitted up for somebody's reception, and been thereupon fresh painted. Every date in question was determinable only by internal evidence, and it became necessary for me to examine not only every one of the older palaces, stone by stone, but every fragment throughout the city which afforded any clue to the formation

of its styles. This I did as well as I could, and I believe there will be found, in the following pages, the only existing account of the details of early Venetian architecture on which dependence can be placed, as far as it goes. I do not care to point out the deficiencies of other works on this subject; the reader will find, if he examines them, either that the buildings to which I shall specially direct his attention have been hitherto undescribed, or else that there are great discrepancies between previous descriptions and mine: for which discrepancies I may be permitted to give this single and sufficient reason, that my account of every building is based on personal examination and measurement of it, and that my taking the pains so to examine what I had to describe, was a subject of grave surprise to my Italian friends. The work of the Marchese Selvatico is, however, to be distinguished with respect; it is clear in arrangement, and full of useful, though vague, information; and I have found cause to adopt, in great measure, its views of the chronological succession of the edifices of Venice. I shall have cause hereafter to quarrel with it on other grounds, but not without expression of gratitude for the assistance it has given me. Fontana's "Fabbriche di Venezia" is also historically valuable, but does not attempt to give architectural detail. Cicognara, as is now generally known, is so inaccurate as hardly to deserve mention.

Indeed, it is not easy to be accurate in an account of anything, however simple. Zoologists often disagree in their descriptions of the curve of a shell, or the plumage of a bird, though they may lay their specimen on the table, and

examine it at their leisure; how much greater becomes the likelihood of error in the description of things which must be in many parts observed from a distance, or under unfavorable circumstances of light and shade; and of which many of the distinctive features have been worn away by time. I believe few people have any idea of the cost of truth in these things; of the expenditure of time necessary to make sure of the simplest facts, and of the strange way in which separate observations will sometimes falsify each other, incapable of reconcilement, owing to some imperceptible inadvertency. I am ashamed of the number of times in which I have had to say, in the following pages, “I am not sure,” and I claim for them no authority, as if they were thoroughly sifted from error, even in what they more confidently state. Only, as far as my time, and strength, and mind served me, I have endeavored down to the smallest matters, to ascertain and speak the truth.

Nor was the subject without many and most discouraging difficulties, peculiar to itself. As far as my inquiries have extended, there is not a building in Venice, raised prior to the sixteenth century, which has not sustained essential change in one or more of its most important features. By far the greater number present examples of three or four different styles, it may be successive, it may be accidentally associated; and, in many instances, the restorations or additions have gradually replaced the entire structure of the ancient fabric, of which nothing but the name remains, together with a kind of identity, exhibited in the anomalous association of the modernized portions: the Will of the old building asserted through them all, stubbornly, though

vainly, expressive; superseded by codicils, and falsified by misinterpretation; yet animating what would otherwise be a mere group of fantastic masque, as embarrassing to the antiquary, as to the mineralogist, the epigene crystal, formed by materials of one substance modelled on the perished crystals of another. The church of St. Mark’s itself, harmonious as its structure may at first sight appear, is an epitome of the changes of Venetian architecture from the tenth to the nineteenth century. Its crypt, and the line of low arches which support the screen, are apparently the earliest portions; the lower stories of the main fabric are of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, with later Gothic interpolations; the pinnacles are of the earliest fully developed Venetian Gothic (fourteenth century); but one of them, that on the projection at the eastern extremity of the Piazzetta de Leoni, is of far finer, and probably earlier workmanship than all the rest. The southern range of pinnacles is again inferior to the northern and western, and visibly of later date. Then the screen, which most writers have described as part of the original fabric, bears its date inscribed on its architrave, 1394, and with it are associated a multitude of small screens, balustrades, decorations of the interior building, and probably the rose window of the south transept. Then come the interpolated traceries of the front and sides; then the crocketings of the upper arches, extravagances of the incipient Renaissance: and, finally, the figures which carry the waterspouts on the north side—utterly barbarous seventeenth or eighteenth century work—connect the whole with the plastered restorations of the year 1844 and 1845. Most of the palaces in Venice have

sustained interpolations hardly less numerous; and those of the Ducal Palace are so intricate, that a year's labor would probably be insufficient altogether to disentangle and define them. I therefore gave up all thoughts of obtaining a perfectly clear chronological view of the early architecture; but the dates necessary to the main purposes of the book the reader will find well established; and of the evidence brought forward for those of less importance, he is himself to judge. Doubtful estimates are never made grounds of argument; and the accuracy of the account of the buildings themselves, for which alone I pledge myself, is of course entirely independent of them.

In like manner, as the statements briefly made in the chapters on construction involve questions so difficult and so general, that I cannot hope that every expression referring to them will be found free from error: and as the conclusions to which I have endeavored to lead the reader are thrown into a form the validity of which depends on that of each successive step, it might be argued, if fallacy or weakness could be detected in one of them, that all the subsequent reasonings were valueless. The reader may be assured, however, that it is not so; the method of proof used in the following essay being only one out of many which were in my choice, adopted because it seemed to me the shortest and simplest, not as being the strongest. In many cases, the conclusions are those which men of quick feeling would arrive at instinctively; and I then sought to discover the reasons of what so strongly recommended itself as truth. Though these reasons could every one of them, from the beginning to the end of the book, be proved insufficient,

the truth of its conclusions would remain the same. I should only regret that I had dishonored them by an ill-grounded defence; and endeavor to repair my error by a better one.

I have not, however, written carelessly; nor should I in any wise have expressed doubt of the security of the following argument, but that it is physically impossible for me, being engaged quite as much with mountains, and clouds, and trees, and criticism of painting, as with architecture, to verify, as I should desire, the expression of every sentence bearing upon empirical and technical matters. Life is not long enough; nor does a day pass by without causing me to feel more bitterly the impossibility of carrying out to the extent which I should desire, the separate studies which general criticism continually forces me to undertake. I can only assure the reader, that he will find the certainty of every statement I permit myself to make, increase with its importance; and that, for the security of the final conclusions of the following essay, as well as for the resolute veracity of its account of whatever facts have come under my own immediate cognizance, I will pledge myself to the uttermost.

It was necessary, to the accomplishment of the purpose of the work (of which account is given in the First Chapter), that I should establish some canons of judgment, which the general reader should thoroughly understand, and, if it pleased him, accept, before we took cognizance, together, of any architecture whatsoever. It has taken me more time and trouble to do this than I expected; but, if I have succeeded, the thing done will be of use for many other purposes than that to which it is now put. The establishment

of these canons, which I have called “the Foundations,” and some account of the connection of Venetian architecture with that of the rest of Europe, have filled the present volume. The second will, I hope, contain all I have to say about Venice itself.

It was of course inexpedient to reduce drawings of crowded details to the size of an octavo volume—I do not say impossible, but inexpedient; requiring infinite pains on the part of the engraver, with no result except farther pains to the beholder. And as, on the other hand, folio books are not easy reading, I determined to separate the text and the unreducible plates. I have given, with the principal text, all the illustrations absolutely necessary to the understanding of it, and, in the detached work, such additional text as has special reference to the larger illustrations.

A considerable number of these larger plates were at first intended to be executed in tinted lithography; but, finding the result unsatisfactory, I have determined to prepare the principal subjects for mezzotinting—a change of method requiring two new drawings to be made of every subject; one a carefully penned outline for the etcher, and then a finished drawing upon the etching. This work does not proceed fast, while I am also occupied with the completion of the text; but the numbers of it will appear as fast as I can prepare them.

For the illustrations of the body of the work itself, I have used any kind of engraving which seemed suited to the subjects—line and mezzotint, on steel, with mixed lithographs and woodcuts, at considerable loss of uniformity in the appearance of the volume, but, I hope, with

advantage, in rendering the character of the architecture it describes. And both in the plates and the text I have aimed chiefly at clear intelligibility; that any one, however little versed in the subject, might be able to take up the book, and understand what it meant forthwith. I have utterly failed of my purpose, if I have not made all the essential parts of the essay intelligible to the least learned, and easy to the most desultory readers, who are likely to take interest in the matter at all. There are few passages which even require so much as an acquaintance with the elements of Euclid, and these may be missed, without harm to the sense of the rest, by every reader to whom they may appear mysterious; and the architectural terms necessarily employed (which are very few) are explained as they occur, or in a note; so that, though I may often be found trite or tedious, I trust that I shall not be obscure. I am especially anxious to rid this essay of ambiguity, because I want to gain the ear of all kinds of persons. Every man has, at some time of his life, personal interest in architecture. He has influence on the design of some public building; or he has to buy, or build, or alter his own house. It signifies less whether the knowledge of other arts be general or not; men may live without buying pictures or statues: but, in architecture, all must in some way commit themselves; they *must* do mischief, and waste their money, if they do not know how to turn it to account. Churches, and shops, and warehouses, and cottages, and small row, and place, and terrace houses, must be built, and lived in, however joyless or inconvenient. And it is assuredly intended that all of us should have knowledge, and act upon our knowledge, in matters with which we are daily

concerned, and not to be left to the caprice of architects or mercy of contractors. There is not, indeed, anything in the following essay bearing on the special forms and needs of modern buildings; but the principles it inculcates are universal; and they are illustrated from the remains of a city which should surely be interesting to the men of London, as affording the richest existing examples of architecture raised by a mercantile community, for civil uses, and domestic magnificence.

Denmark Hill, *February*, 1851.

CHAPTER I.
THE QUARRY.

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§ I. Since the first dominion of men was asserted over the ocean, three thrones, of mark beyond all others, have been set upon its sands: the thrones of Tyre, Venice, and England. Of the First of these great powers only the memory remains; of the Second, the ruin; the Third, which inherits their greatness, if it forget their example, may be led through prouder eminence to less pitied destruction.

The exaltation, the sin, and the punishment of Tyre have been recorded for us, in perhaps the most touching words ever uttered by the Prophets of Israel against the cities of the stranger. But we read them as a lovely song; and close our ears to the sternness of their warning: for the very depth of the Fall of Tyre has blinded us to its reality, and we forget, as we watch the bleaching of the rocks between the sunshine and the sea, that they were once “as in Eden, the garden of God.”

Her successor, like her in perfection of beauty, though less in endurance of dominion, is still left for our beholding in the final period of her decline: a ghost upon the sands of the sea, so weak—so quiet—so bereft of all but her loveliness, that we might well doubt, as we watched her faint reflection in the mirage of the lagoon, which was the City, and which the Shadow.

I would endeavor to trace the lines of this image before it be for ever lost, and to record, as far as I may, the warning

which seems to me to be uttered by every one of the fast-gaining waves, that beat, like passing bells, against the Stones of Venice.

§ II. It would be difficult to overrate the value of the lessons which might be derived from a faithful study of the history of this strange and mighty city: a history which, in spite of the labor of countless chroniclers, remains in vague and disputable outline—barred with brightness and shade, like the far away edge of her own ocean, where the surf and the sand-bank are mingled with the sky. The inquiries in which we have to engage will hardly render this outline clearer, but their results will, in some degree, alter its aspect; and, so far as they bear upon it at all, they possess an interest of a far higher kind than that usually belonging to architectural investigations. I may, perhaps, in the outset, and in few words, enable the general reader to form a clearer idea of the importance of every existing expression of Venetian character through Venetian art, and of the breadth of interest which the true history of Venice embraces, than he is likely to have gleaned from the current fables of her mystery or magnificence.

§ III. Venice is usually conceived as an oligarchy: She was so during a period less than the half of her existence, and that including the days of her decline; and it is one of the first questions needing severe examination, whether that decline was owing in any wise to the change in the form of her government, or altogether, as assuredly in great part, to changes, in the character of the persons of whom it was composed.

The state of Venice existed Thirteen Hundred and Seventy-six years, from the first establishment of a consular government on the island of the Rialto,[1] to the moment when the General-in-chief of the French army of Italy pronounced the Venetian republic a thing of the past. Of this period, Two Hundred and Seventy-six[2] years were passed in a nominal subjection to the cities of old Venetia, especially to Padua, and in an agitated form of democracy, of which the executive appears to have been entrusted to tribunes,[3] chosen, one by the inhabitants of each of the principal islands. For six hundred years,[4] during which the power of Venice was continually on the increase, her government was an elective monarchy, her King or doge possessing, in early times at least, as much independent authority as any other European sovereign, but an authority gradually subjected to limitation, and shortened almost daily of its prerogatives, while it increased in a spectral and incapable magnificence. The final government of the nobles, under the image of a king, lasted for five hundred years, during which Venice reaped the fruits of her former energies, consumed them—and expired.

§ IV. Let the reader therefore conceive the existence of the Venetian state as broadly divided into two periods: the first of nine hundred, the second of five hundred years, the separation being marked by what was called the “Serrar del Consiglio;” that is to say, the final and absolute distinction of the nobles from the commonalty, and the establishment of the government in their hands to the exclusion alike of

the influence of the people on the one side, and the authority of the doge on the other.

Then the first period, of nine hundred years, presents us with the most interesting spectacle of a people struggling out of anarchy into order and power; and then governed, for the most part, by the worthiest and noblest man whom they could find among them,[5] called their Doge or Leader, with an aristocracy gradually and resolutely forming itself around him, out of which, and at last by which, he was chosen; an aristocracy owing its origin to the accidental numbers, influence, and wealth of some among the families of the fugitives from the older Venetia, and gradually organizing itself, by its unity and heroism, into a separate body.

This first period includes the rise of Venice, her noblest achievements, and the circumstances which determined her character and position among European powers; and within its range, as might have been anticipated, we find the names of all her hero princes—of Pietro Urseolo, Ordalafo Falier, Domenico Michieli, Sebastiano Ziani, and Enrico Dandolo.

§ V. The second period opens with a hundred and twenty years, the most eventful in the career of Venice—the central struggle of her life—stained with her darkest crime, the murder of Carrara—disturbed by her most dangerous internal sedition, the conspiracy of Falier—oppressed by her most fatal war, the war of Chiozza—and distinguished by the glory of her two noblest citizens (for in this period the heroism of her citizens replaces that of her monarchs), Vittor Pisani and Carlo Zeno.

I date the commencement of the Fall of Venice from the death of Carlo Zeno, 8th May, 1418;[6] the *visible* commencement from that of another of her noblest and wisest children, the Doge Tomaso Mocenigo, who expired five years later. The reign of Foscari followed, gloomy with pestilence and war; a war in which large acquisitions of territory were made by subtle or fortunate policy in Lombardy, and disgrace, significant as irreparable, sustained in the battles on the Po at Cremona, and in the marshes of Caravaggio. In 1454, Venice, the first of the states of Christendom, humiliated herself to the Turk: in the same year was established the Inquisition of State,[7] and from this period her government takes the perfidious and mysterious form under which it is usually conceived. In 1477, the great Turkish invasion spread terror to the shores of the lagoons; and in 1508 the league of Cambrai marks the period usually assigned as the commencement of the decline of the Venetian power;[8] the commercial prosperity of Venice in the close of the fifteenth century blinding her historians to the previous evidence of the diminution of her internal strength.

§ VI. Now there is apparently a significative coincidence between the establishment of the aristocratic and oligarchical powers, and the diminution of the prosperity of the state. But this is the very question at issue; and it appears to me quite undetermined by any historian, or determined by each in accordance with his own prejudices. It is a triple question: first, whether the oligarchy established by the efforts of individual ambition was the cause, in its subsequent operation, of the Fall of Venice; or

(secondly) whether the establishment of the oligarchy itself be not the sign and evidence, rather than the cause, of national enervation; or (lastly) whether, as I rather think, the history of Venice might not be written almost without reference to the construction of her senate or the prerogatives of her Doge. It is the history of a people eminently at unity in itself, descendants of Roman race, long disciplined by adversity, and compelled by its position either to live nobly or to perish:—for a thousand years they fought for life; for three hundred they invited death: their battle was rewarded, and their call was heard.

§ VII. Throughout her career, the victories of Venice, and, at many periods of it, her safety, were purchased by individual heroism; and the man who exalted or saved her was sometimes (oftenest) her king, sometimes a noble, sometimes a citizen. To him no matter, nor to her: the real question is, not so much what names they bore, or with what powers they were entrusted, as how they were trained; how they were made masters of themselves, servants of their country, patient of distress, impatient of dishonor; and what was the true reason of the change from the time when she could find saviours among those whom she had cast into prison, to that when the voices of her own children commanded her to sign covenant with Death.[9]

§ VIII. On this collateral question I wish the reader's mind to be fixed throughout all our subsequent inquiries. It will give double interest to every detail: nor will the interest be profitless; for the evidence which I shall be able to deduce from the arts of Venice will be both frequent and irrefragable, that the decline of her political prosperity was

exactly coincident with that of domestic and individual religion.

I say domestic and individual; for—and this is the second point which I wish the reader to keep in mind—the most curious phenomenon in all Venetian history is the vitality of religion in private life, and its deadness in public policy. Amidst the enthusiasm, chivalry, or fanaticism of the other states of Europe, Venice stands, from first to last, like a masked statue; her coldness impenetrable, her exertion only aroused by the touch of a secret spring. That spring was her commercial interest—this the one motive of all her important political acts, or enduring national animosities. She could forgive insults to her honor, but never rivalship in her commerce; she calculated the glory of her conquests by their value, and estimated their justice by their facility. The fame of success remains, when the motives of attempt are forgotten; and the casual reader of her history may perhaps be surprised to be reminded, that the expedition which was commanded by the noblest of her princes, and whose results added most to her military glory, was one in which while all Europe around her was wasted by the fire of its devotion, she first calculated the highest price she could exact from its piety for the armament she furnished, and then, for the advancement of her own private interests, at once broke her faith[10] and betrayed her religion.

§ IX. And yet, in the midst of this national criminality, we shall be struck again and again by the evidences of the most noble individual feeling. The tears of Dandolo were not shed in hypocrisy, though they could not blind him to the importance of the conquest of Zara. The habit of assigning

to religion a direct influence over all *his own* actions, and all the affairs of *his own* daily life, is remarkable in every great Venetian during the times of the prosperity of the state; nor are instances wanting in which the private feeling of the citizens reaches the sphere of their policy, and even becomes the guide of its course where the scales of expediency are doubtfully balanced. I sincerely trust that the inquirer would be disappointed who should endeavor to trace any more immediate reasons for their adoption of the cause of Alexander III. against Barbarossa, than the piety which was excited by the character of their suppliant, and the noble pride which was provoked by the insolence of the emperor. But the heart of Venice is shown only in her hastiest councils; her worldly spirit recovers the ascendency whenever she has time to calculate the probabilities of advantage, or when they are sufficiently distinct to need no calculation; and the entire subjection of private piety to national policy is not only remarkable throughout the almost endless series of treacheries and tyrannies by which her empire was enlarged and maintained, but symbolised by a very singular circumstance in the building of the city itself. I am aware of no other city of Europe in which its cathedral was not the principal feature. But the principal church in Venice was the chapel attached to the palace of her prince, and called the “Chiesa Ducale.” The patriarchal church,[11] inconsiderable in size and mean in decoration, stands on the outermost islet of the Venetian group, and its name, as well as its site, is probably unknown to the greater number of travellers passing hastily through the city. Nor is it less worthy of remark, that the two most important temples of

Venice, next to the ducal chapel, owe their size and magnificence, not to national effort, but to the energy of the Franciscan and Dominican monks, supported by the vast organization of those great societies on the mainland of Italy, and countenanced by the most pious, and perhaps also, in his generation, the most wise, of all the princes of Venice,[12] who now rests beneath the roof of one of those very temples, and whose life is not satirized by the images of the Virtues which a Tuscan sculptor has placed around his tomb.

§ X. There are, therefore, two strange and solemn lights in which we have to regard almost every scene in the fitful history of the Rivo Alto. We find, on the one hand, a deep and constant tone of individual religion characterising the lives of the citizens of Venice in her greatness; we find this spirit influencing them in all the familiar and immediate concerns of life, giving a peculiar dignity to the conduct even of their commercial transactions, and confessed by them with a simplicity of faith that may well put to shame the hesitation with which a man of the world at present admits (even if it be so in reality) that religious feeling has any influence over the minor branches of his conduct. And we find as the natural consequence of all this, a healthy serenity of mind and energy of will expressed in all their actions, and a habit of heroism which never fails them, even when the immediate motive of action ceases to be praiseworthy. With the fulness of this spirit the prosperity of the state is exactly correspondent, and with its failure her decline, and that with a closeness and precision which it will be one of the collateral objects of the following essay to

demonstrate from such accidental evidence as the field of its inquiry presents. And, thus far, all is natural and simple. But the stopping short of this religious faith when it appears likely to influence national action, correspondent as it is, and that most strikingly, with several characteristics of the temper of our present English legislature, is a subject, morally and politically, of the most curious interest and complicated difficulty; one, however, which the range of my present inquiry will not permit me to approach, and for the treatment of which I must be content to furnish materials in the light I may be able to throw upon the private tendencies of the Venetian character.

§ XI. There is, however, another most interesting feature in the policy of Venice which will be often brought before us; and which a Romanist would gladly assign as the reason of its irreligion; namely, the magnificent and successful struggle which she maintained against the temporal authority of the Church of Rome. It is true that, in a rapid survey of her career, the eye is at first arrested by the strange drama to which I have already alluded, closed by that ever memorable scene in the portico of St. Mark's,[13] the central expression in most men's thoughts of the unendurable elevation of the pontifical power; it is true that the proudest thoughts of Venice, as well as the insignia of her prince, and the form of her chief festival, recorded the service thus rendered to the Roman Church. But the enduring sentiment of years more than balanced the enthusiasm of a moment; and the bull of Clement V., which excommunicated the Venetians and their doge, likening them to Dathan, Abiram, Absalom, and Lucifer, is a stronger

evidence of the great tendencies of the Venetian government than the umbrella of the doge or the ring of the Adriatic. The humiliation of Francesco Dandolo blotted out the shame of Barbarossa, and the total exclusion of ecclesiastics from all share in the councils of Venice became an enduring mark of her knowledge of the spirit of the Church of Rome, and of her defiance of it.

To this exclusion of Papal influence from her councils, the Romanist will attribute their irreligion, and the Protestant their success.[14] The first may be silenced by a reference to the character of the policy of the Vatican itself; and the second by his own shame, when he reflects that the English legislature sacrificed their principles to expose themselves to the very danger which the Venetian senate sacrificed theirs to avoid.

§ XII. One more circumstance remains to be noted respecting the Venetian government, the singular unity of the families composing it—unity far from sincere or perfect, but still admirable when contrasted with the fiery feuds, the almost daily revolutions, the restless successions of families and parties in power, which fill the annals of the other states of Italy. That rivalship should sometimes be ended by the dagger, or enmity conducted to its ends under the mask of law, could not but be anticipated where the fierce Italian spirit was subjected to so severe a restraint: it is much that jealousy appears usually unmingled with illegitimate ambition, and that, for every instance in which private passion sought its gratification through public danger, there are a thousand in which it was sacrificed to the public advantage. Venice may well call upon us to note with

reverence, that of all the towers which are still seen rising like a branchless forest from her islands, there is but one whose office was other than that of summoning to prayer, and that one was a watch-tower only: from first to last, while the palaces of the other cities of Italy were lifted into sullen fortitudes of rampart, and fringed with forked battlements for the javelin and the bow, the sands of Venice never sank under the weight of a war tower, and her roof terraces were wreathed with Arabian imagery, of golden globes suspended on the leaves of lilies.[15]

§ XIII. These, then, appear to me to be the points of chief general interest in the character and fate of the Venetian people. I would next endeavor to give the reader some idea of the manner in which the testimony of Art bears upon these questions, and of the aspect which the arts themselves assume when they are regarded in their true connexion with the history of the state.

1st. Receive the witness of Painting.

It will be remembered that I put the commencement of the Fall of Venice as far back as 1418.

Now, John Bellini was born in 1423, and Titian in 1480. John Bellini, and his brother Gentile, two years older than he, close the line of the sacred painters of Venice. But the most solemn spirit of religious faith animates their works to the last. There is no religion in any work of Titian’s: there is not even the smallest evidence of religious temper or sympathies either in himself, or in those for whom he painted. His larger sacred subjects are merely themes for the exhibition of pictorial rhetoric—composition and color. His minor works are generally made subordinate to

purposes of portraiture. The Madonna in the church of the Frari is a mere lay figure, introduced to form a link of connexion between the portraits of various members of the Pesaro family who surround her.

Now this is not merely because John Bellini was a religious man and Titian was not. Titian and Bellini are each true representatives of the school of painters contemporary with them; and the difference in their artistic feeling is a consequence not so much of difference in their own natural characters as in their early education: Bellini was brought up in faith; Titian in formalism. Between the years of their births the vital religion of Venice had expired.

§ XIV. The *vital* religion, observe, not the formal. Outward observance was as strict as ever; and doge and senator still were painted, in almost every important instance, kneeling before the Madonna or St. Mark; a confession of faith made universal by the pure gold of the Venetian sequin. But observe the great picture of Titian’s in the ducal palace, of the Doge Antonio Grimani kneeling before Faith: there is a curious lesson in it. The figure of Faith is a coarse portrait of one of Titian’s least graceful female models: Faith had become carnal. The eye is first caught by the flash of the Doge’s armor. The heart of Venice was in her wars, not in her worship.

The mind of Tintoret, incomparably more deep and serious than that of Titian, casts the solemnity of its own tone over the sacred subjects which it approaches, and sometimes forgets itself into devotion; but the principle of treatment is altogether the same as Titian’s: absolute

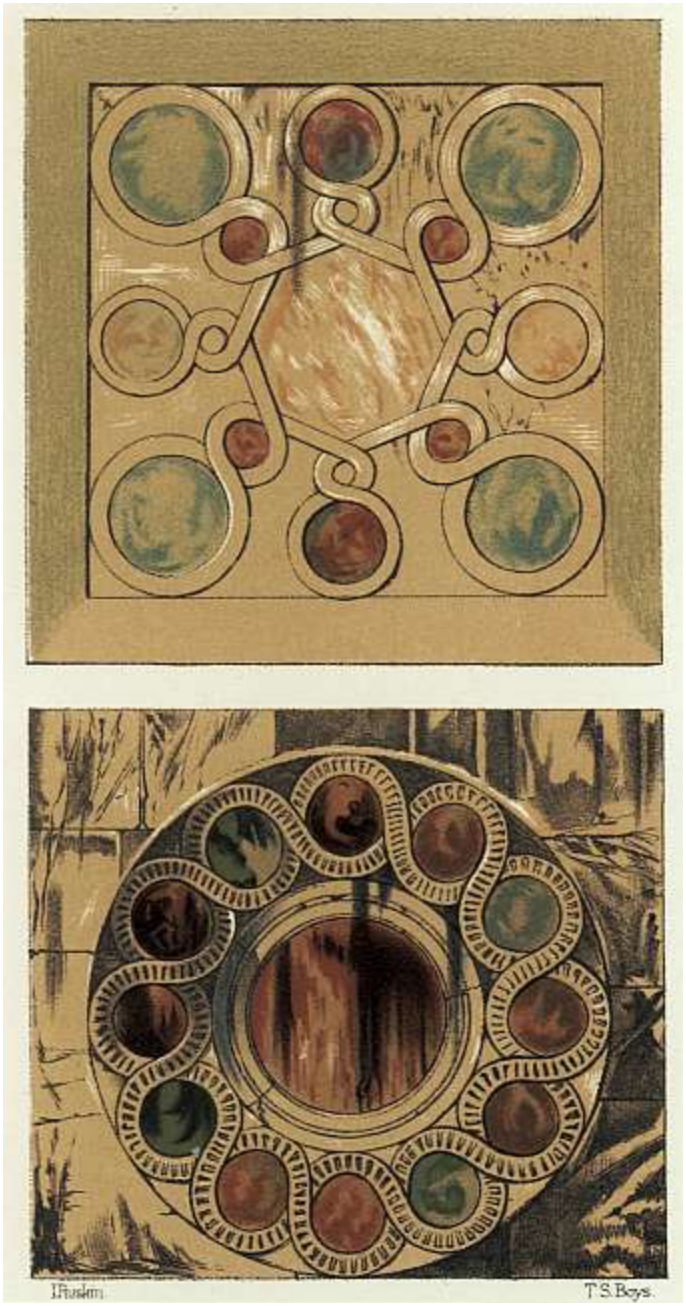
subordination of the religious subject to purposes of decoration or portraiture.

The evidence might be accumulated a thousandfold from the works of Veronese, and of every succeeding painter—that the fifteenth century had taken away the religious heart of Venice.

§ XV. Such is the evidence of Painting. To collect that of Architecture will be our task through many a page to come; but I must here give a general idea of its heads.

Philippe de Commynes, writing of his entry into Venice in 1495, says—

“Chascun me feit seoir au meillieu de ces deux ambassadeurs qui est l’honneur d’Italie que d’estre au meillieu; et me menerent au long de la grant rue, qu’ilz appellent le Canal Grant, et est bien large. Les gallees y passent à travers et y ay ven navire de quatre cens tonneaux ou plus pres des maisons: et est la plus belle rue que je croy qui soit en tout le monde, et la mieulx maisonnee, et va le long de la ville. Les maisons sont fort grandes et haultes, et de bonne pierre, et les anciennes toutes painctes; les aultres faictes depuis cent ans: toutes ont le devant de marbre blanc, qui leur vient d’Istrie, à cent mils de là, et encores maincte grant piece de porphire et de sarpentine sur le devant.... C’est la plus triumphante cité que j’aye jamais vene et qui plus faict d’honneur à ambassadeurs et estrangiers, et qui plus saigement se gouverne, et où le service de Dieu est le plus sollempnellement faict: et encores qu’il y peust bien avoir d’aultres faultes, si je croy que Dieu les a en ayde pour la reverence qu’ilz portent au service de l’Eglise.”[16]



Wall-Veil-Decoration.
CA’TREVISAN CA’DARIO.

§ XVI. This passage is of peculiar interest, for two reasons. Observe, first, the impression of Commynes respecting the religion of Venice: of which, as I have above

said, the forms still remained with some glimmering of life in them, and were the evidence of what the real life had been in former times. But observe, secondly, the impression instantly made on Commynes' mind by the distinction between the elder palaces and those built "within this last hundred years; which all have their fronts of white marble brought from Istria, a hundred miles away, and besides, many a large piece of porphyry and serpentine upon their fronts."

On the opposite page I have given two of the ornaments of the palaces which so struck the French ambassador.[17] He was right in his notice of the distinction. There had indeed come a change over Venetian architecture in the fifteenth century; and a change of some importance to us moderns: we English owe to it our St. Paul's Cathedral, and Europe in general owes to it the utter degradation or destruction of her schools of architecture, never since revived. But that the reader may understand this, it is necessary that he should have some general idea of the connexion of the architecture of Venice with that of the rest of Europe, from its origin forwards.

§ XVII. All European architecture, bad and good, old and new, is derived from Greece through Rome, and colored and perfected from the East. The history of architecture is nothing but the tracing of the various modes and directions of this derivation. Understand this, once for all: if you hold fast this great connecting clue, you may string all the types of successive architectural invention upon it like so many beads. The Doric and the Corinthian orders are the roots, the one of all Romanesque, massy-capitaled buildings—