

F. Marion Crawford

# Salve Venetia



(Vol.1&2)



**F. Marion Crawford**

# **Salve Venetia (Vol.1&2)**

**The Gleanings from Venetian history (With  
Original Illustrations)**

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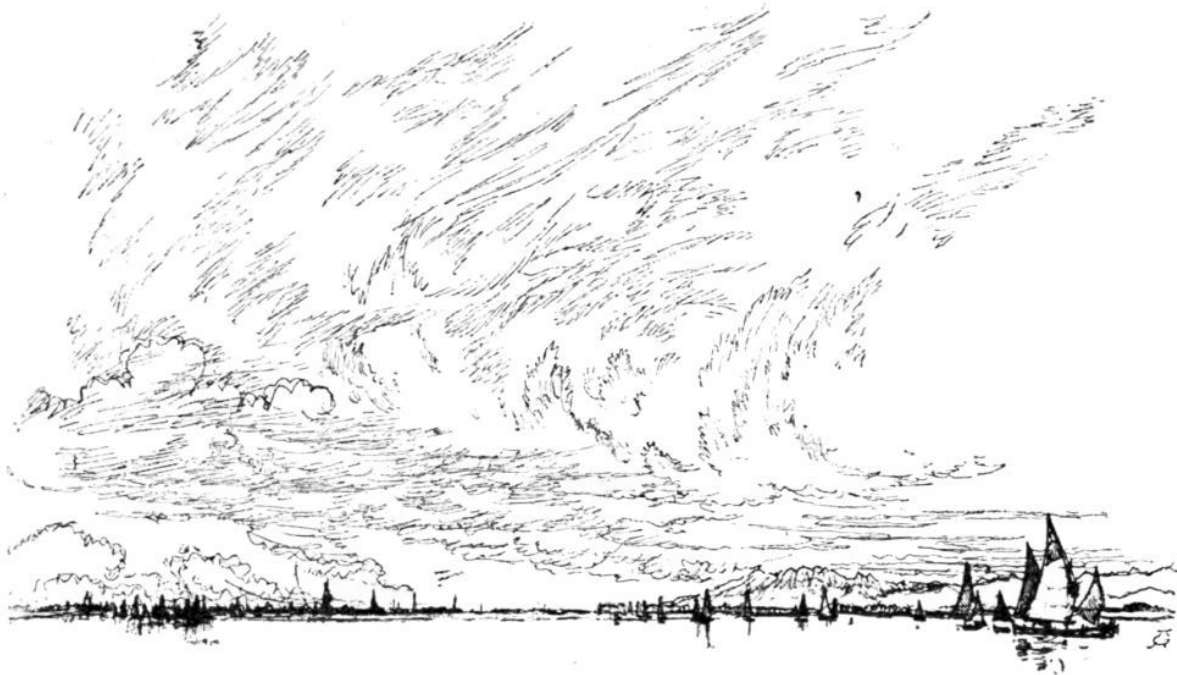
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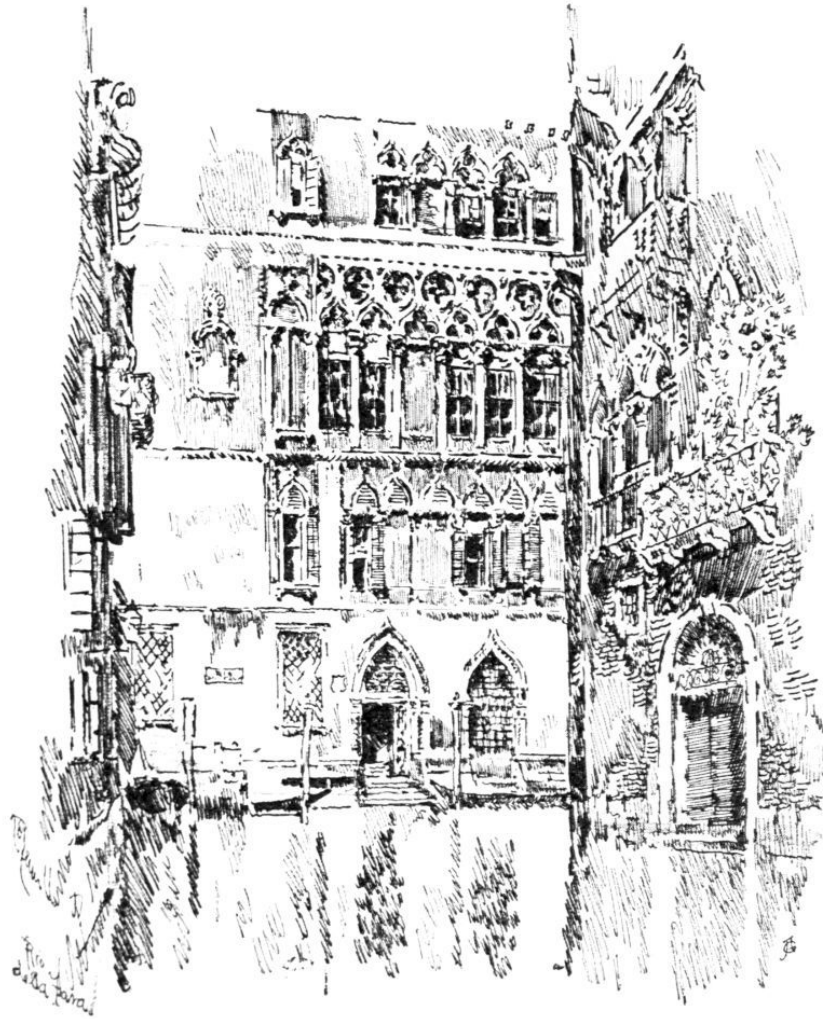
**FROM OUTSIDE THE LIDO**

# **SALVE VENETIA!**

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Venice is the most personal of all cities in the world, the most feminine, the most comparable to a woman, the least dependent, for her individuality, upon her inhabitants, ancient or modern. What would Rome be without the memory of the Cæsars? What would Paris be without the Parisians? What was Constantinople like before it was Turkish? The imagination can hardly picture a Venice different from her present self at any time in her history. Where all is colour, the more brilliant costumes of earlier times could add but little; a general exodus of all her inhabitants to-day would leave almost as much of it behind. In the still canals the gorgeous palaces continually gaze down upon their own reflected images with placid satisfaction, and look with calm indifference upon the changing generations of men and women that glide upon the waters. The mists gather upon the mysterious lagoons and sink away again before the devouring light, day after day, year after year, century after century; and Venice is always there herself, sleeping or waking, laughing, weeping, dreaming, singing or sighing, living her own life through ages, with an intensely vital personality which time has hardly modified, and is altogether powerless to destroy. Somehow it would not surprise those who know her, to come suddenly upon her and find that all human life was extinct within her, while her own went on, strong as ever; nor yet, in the other extreme, would it seem astonishing if all that has been should begin again, as though it had never ceased to be, if the Bucentaur swept down the Grand Canal to the beat of its two hundred oars, bearing the Doge out to wed the sea with gorgeous train; if the Great Council began to sit again in all its splendour; if the Piazza were thronged

once more with men and women from the pictures of Paris Bordone, Tintoretto, Paolo Veronese, and Titian; if Eastern shipping crowded the entrance to the Giudecca, and Eastern merchants filled the shady ways of the Merceria. What miracle could seem miraculous in Venice, the city of wonders?



### **RIO DELLA PACE**

*Mut. Less.*

It is hard indeed to recall the beginnings of the city, and the time when a few sand-ridges just rose above the surface of the motionless lagoon, like the backs of dozing whales in



a summer sea. The fishermen from the mainland saw the resemblance too, and called them 'backs'—'dorsi'—giving some of them names which like 'Dorso duro' have clung to them until our own time, and will perhaps live on, years hence, among other generations of fishermen when Venice shall have disappeared into the waste of sand and water, out of which her astonishing personality grew into being, and in which it has flourished and survived nearly fifteen centuries.

We are not concerned scientifically with the origin of the Venetian people or of their name; we need not go back with Romanin to the legendary days of the first great struggle between Asia and Europe, in the hope of proving that the Venetians were of the great Scythian race and took the side of Troy against the injured Atrides; it matters not at all whether the Venetians were the same as the Eneti, whether Eneti was a Greek name signifying those that 'went in,' the 'Intruders,' or whether it came from the Syriac Hanida, meaning a 'Pilgrim.' Venice did not begin under the walls of Troy, nor even in the great Roman consular province of the mainland that bore the name and handed it down. Venice began to exist when Europe rang with the cry of fear—'The Huns are upon us!'—on the day when the first fugitives, blind with terror, stumbled ashore upon the back of one of the sand whales in the lagoon, and dared not go back.



### **EVENING IN THE LAGOON**

Venice was Venice from the first, and is Venice still, a person in our imagination, almost more than a place. To most people her name does not instantly suggest names of great Venetians, as 'Florence' suggests the Medici, as 'Rome' suggests the Cæsars and the Popes, as 'Paris' suggests Louis XIV. and Bonaparte, as 'Constantinople' suggests the Sultan and 'Bagdad' the Caliphs. 'Venice' calls up a dream of colour, of rich palaces and of still water, and at the name there are more men who will think of Shylock and Othello than of Enrico Dandolo, or Titian, or Carlo Zeno, or Vittor Pisani. Without much reading and some study it is almost impossible to realise that Venice was once a great European power and a weighty element in the alternating

equilibrium and unrest of nations; Venice seems to-day a capital without a country, an empress without an empire, and one thinks of her as having always existed simply in order to be always herself, a Venice for Venice's sake, as it were, and not for the purpose of exercising any power, nor as the product of extraneous forces concentrated at a point and working towards a result.

These considerations may explain the charm felt by all those who know her, and the attraction, also, which is in most books that treat her as an artistic and romantic whole, complete in herself, to be studied, admired, and perhaps worshipped, with only an occasional allusion to her political history. So, too, one may account for the dry dulness and uncharming prosiness of most books that profess to tell the history of Venice impartially and justly. There is no such thing as impartial history, and impartial justice is an empty phrase, as every lawyer knows. It is only the second-rate historian, or the compiler of school primers, who does not take one side or the other in the struggles he describes; and a judge who feels no instinctive sympathy for right against wrong, while as yet but half proved, can never be anything but a judicial hack and a legal machine.

*Preface Chron. Alt.*

Who seeks true poetry, said Rossi, writing on Venice, will find it most abundantly in the early memories of a Christian nation; and indeed the old chronicles are full of it, of idyls, of legends, and of heroic tales. Only dream a while over the yellow pages of Muratori, and presently you will scent the spring flowers of a thousand years ago, and hear the ripple of the blue waves that lent young Venice their purity, their brilliancy, and their fresh young music. You may even enjoy a pagan vision of maiden Aphrodite rising suddenly out of the sea into the sunshine, but the dream dissolves only too soon, grace turns into strength, the lovely smile of the girl-goddess fades from the commanding features of the

reigning queen, and heavenly Venus is already earthly Cleopatra.



**MIDNIGHT, THE LAGOON**

It is better to open our arms gladly to the beautiful when she comes to us, than to prepare our dissecting instruments as soon as we are aware of her presence. Phidias and Praxiteles were ignorant of medical anatomy; Thucydides knew nothing of 'scientific' methods in history; the Rhapsodists were not grammarians. No man need be a grammarian to love Homer, nor a scientific historian if he would be thrilled with interest over the siege of Syracuse, nor an anatomist when he elects to dream before the Hermes of Olympia.

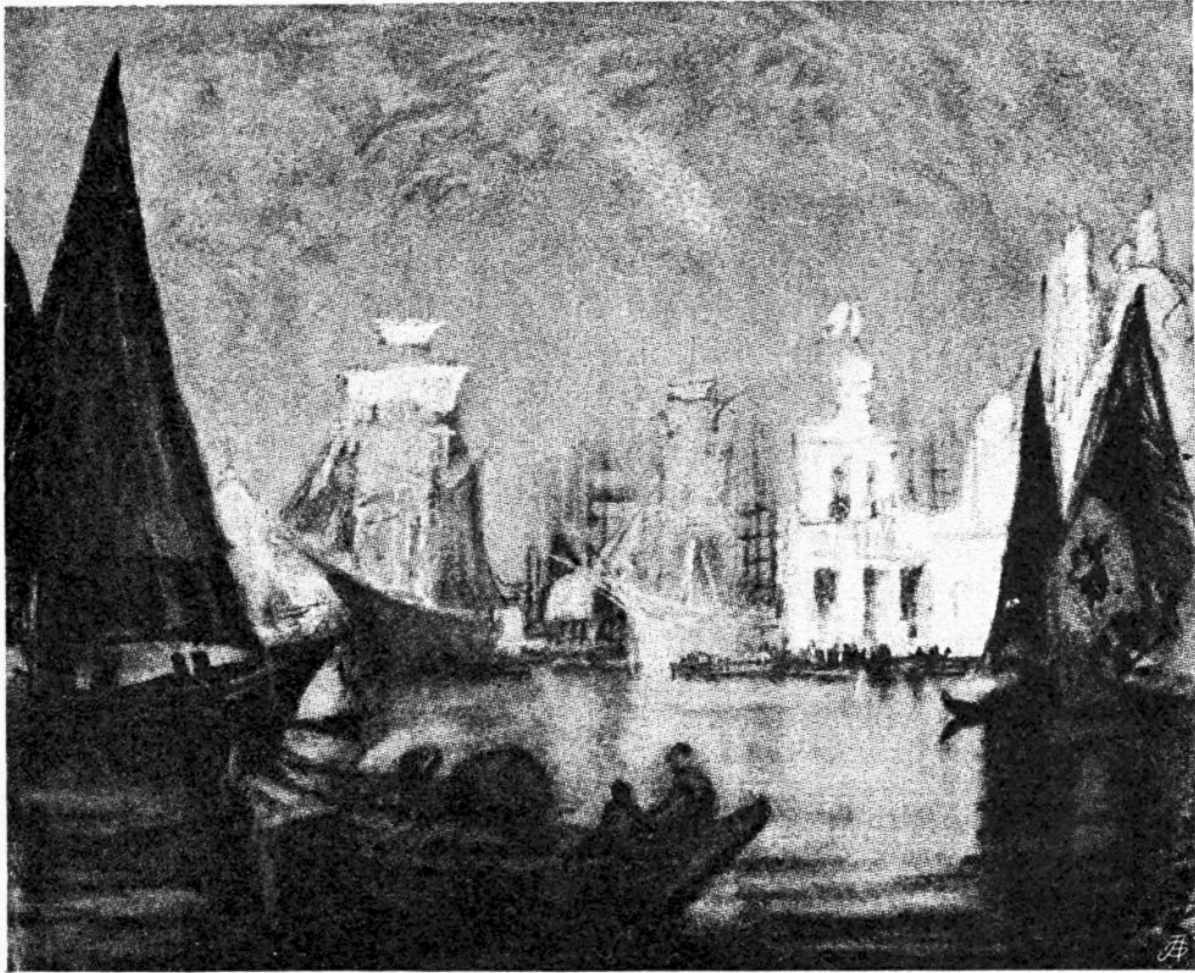
And so with Venice; she is a form of beauty, and must be looked upon as that and nothing else; not critically, for criticism means comparison, and Venice is too personal and individual, and too unlike other cities to be fairly compared with them; not coldly, for she appeals to the senses, and to the human heart, and craves a little warmth of sympathy; above all, not in a spirit of righteous severity, for he who would follow her story must learn to forgive her almost at every step.

She has paid for her mistakes with all save her inextinguishable life; she has expiated her sins of ill-faith, of injustice and ingratitude, by the loss of everything but her imperishable charm; the power and the will to do evil are gone from her with her empire, and her name stands on the subject-roll of another's kingdom; she is a widowed and dethroned queen, she is a lonely and lovely princess; she is the Andromeda of Europe, chained fast to her island and trembling in fear of the monster Modern Progress, whose terrible roar is heard already from the near mainland of Italy, across the protecting water. Will any Perseus come down in time to save her?





**LOOKING TOWARDS ST. GEORGE'S**



**THE CUSTOM-HOUSE, VENICE**

# I THE BEGINNINGS

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In the beginning the river washed sand and mud out through the shallow water at the two mouths of the Brenta; and the tide fought against the streams at flood, so that the silt rose up in bars, but at ebb the salt water rushed out again, mingled with the fresh, and strong turbid currents hollowed channels between the banks, leading out to seaward, until the islands and bars took permanent shape and the currents acquired regular directions, in and out, between and amongst them. In the beginning the spirit of unborn Venice seemed to say, more truly than Archimedes, 'Give me a place whereon to stand, and I will move the world'; and the rivers and the tides heaped up the sand and made a dry place for her in the midst of the sea.



### **THE LIGHTS OF THE LIDO**

The lagoon is a shallow basin, roughly shaped like a crescent, its convexity making a bay in the mainland, its concave side bounded against the open sea by the curving banks, called 'Lidi,' beaches, which are long and narrow islands, to distinguish them from the islets of less regular shape that rise above the surface here and there within the confines of the lagoon, those on which Venice stands, and Torcello and Murano, and others which make a miniature archipelago, ending with Chioggia, at the southern point of the crescent.



## CHIOGGIA

This archipelago contains twelve principal islands, some of which were inhabited by families that got a living by trading, by hunting and by fishing, selling both fish and game to the ships that plied between Ravenna and Aquileia.

Very early the people of the latter city had made a harbour for their vessels on the island of Grado, which was nearest to them, and the Paduans made small commercial stations on the islands of Rialto and Olivolo. Now and then some rich man from the mainland built himself a small villa on one of the wooded islets, and came thither for his pleasure and for sport. For some of these islands were covered with pine-trees and cane-brakes, while some were

muddy, naturally sterile, and inhospitable; but the early settlers had soon solidified and modified the soil, and reduced it to the cultivation of fodder for cattle, and of vines.

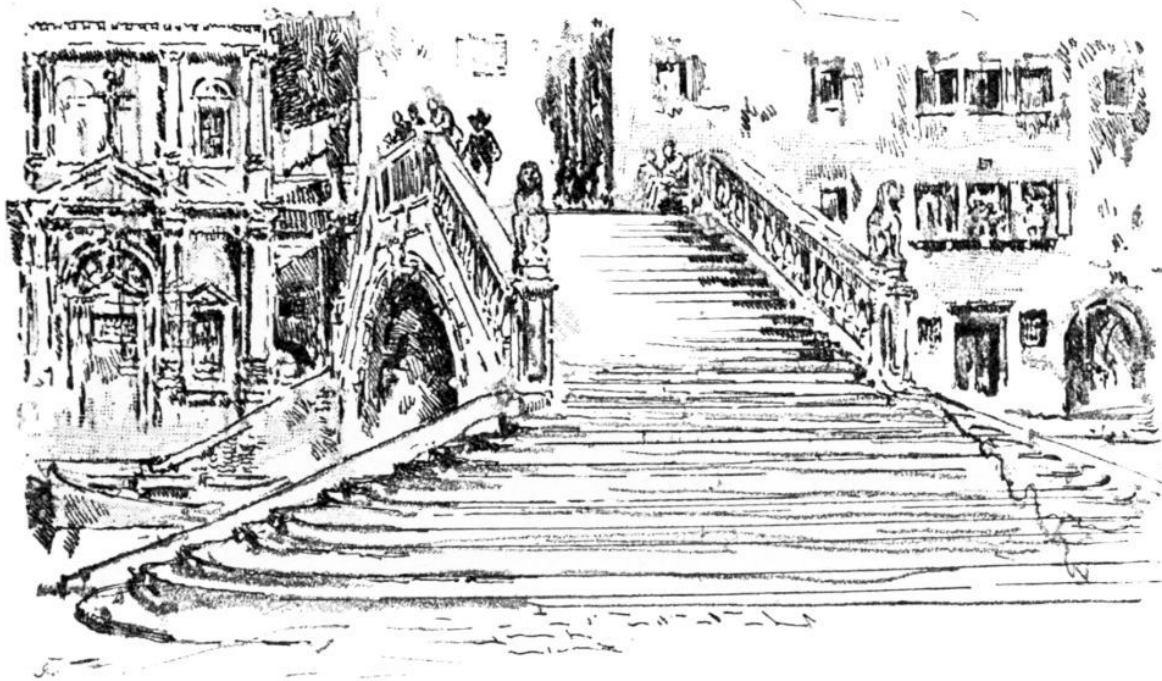
The archipelago was therefore not so much a barren solitude as a quiet corner in very troubled times, and while the small farmers and fishermen knew nothing of Italy's miserable condition, the rich sportsmen who spent a little time there were glad to forget the terrible state of things in their own great world.

*Rom. i. 26.*

For since the capital of the Empire had been transferred to Constantinople, Italy had fallen a prey to the greed of barbarians, and the province of Venetia had been left under the very intermittent protection of a few paid troops supposed to be commanded by a Count or 'Corrector' appointed by the Emperor.

On the rich mainland stood the cities of Venetia, Aquileia, Altinum, Padua, and many more; and the wealthy citizens built villas by the sea, with groves of noble trees, trim gardens and wide fishponds, and marble steps leading down to the water's edge; and they hunted the wild boar and the stag in the near forests, all the way to the foot of the Julian hills. The land was rich, and far removed from turbulent Rome and intriguing Constantinople, and many a Roman noble took sanctuary from politics on the enchanting shore, to dream away his last years in a luxurious philosophy that was based on wealth but was fed on every requirement of culture, and was made sweet by the past experience of danger and unrest.





### **BRIDGE AT CHIOGGIA**

*About 406 A.D.*

Then came the first Goths, with fire and sword—'more fell than anguish, hunger or the sea'—and then a score of years later fair-haired Alaric, the Achilles of the North, and, like Pelides, untiring, wrathful, inexorable, bold, yet just, according to his lights, and high-souled if not high-minded, destined first to terrible defeat at Pollentia, but next to still more awful victory, and soon to death and a mysterious grave.

Before the Goths men scattered and fled, the rich to what seemed safety, in Rome, the poor to the woods, to the hills, to the wretched islets of the lagoon. Back they came to their villas, their sea-baths and their groves, when it was surely known that great Alaric was dead and laid to his royal rest in the bed of the southern river.

They came back, the poor and the rich, while the world-worn, luxurious, highly-cultivated men of the last days of the Empire enjoyed their hunting and fishing in peace; and over

their elaborate dishes and their cups of spiced Greek wine they quoted to each other Martial's lines:—

'Ye shores of Altinum, ye that vie with Baiae's villas—thou grove, that sawest Phaëthon's fiery end—and Maiden Sola, fairest of wood-nymphs thou, espoused beside the Euganean lakes with Faunus of Antenor's Paduan land—and thou, Aquileia, that rejoicest in Tamavus, thine own river, sought by Leda's sons where Castor's steed drank of the seven waters—Ye shall be unto mine old age a haven and resting-place, if but mine ease may have the right to choose.'

But while they repeated the fluent elegiacs they remembered the Goths uneasily, for the Empire was in its last years and weak, and Venetia was protected against the barbarians north and east by a handful of Sarmatian mercenaries. What had happened once might happen again, and as the years slipped by, each one seemed to bring it nearer; and in half a century after Alaric's first descent, there came another conqueror more terrible than the first, whom men called Attila, the Scourge of God; but he told the Christians that he was the dreadful Antichrist, and the people cried out, 'The Huns are upon us,' and they fled for their lives into the cities. Aquileia, at that time the second city of Italy, and Padua, Altinum and others, defended themselves and fell, and the people who could not escape perished miserably.

*D' Ancona.*

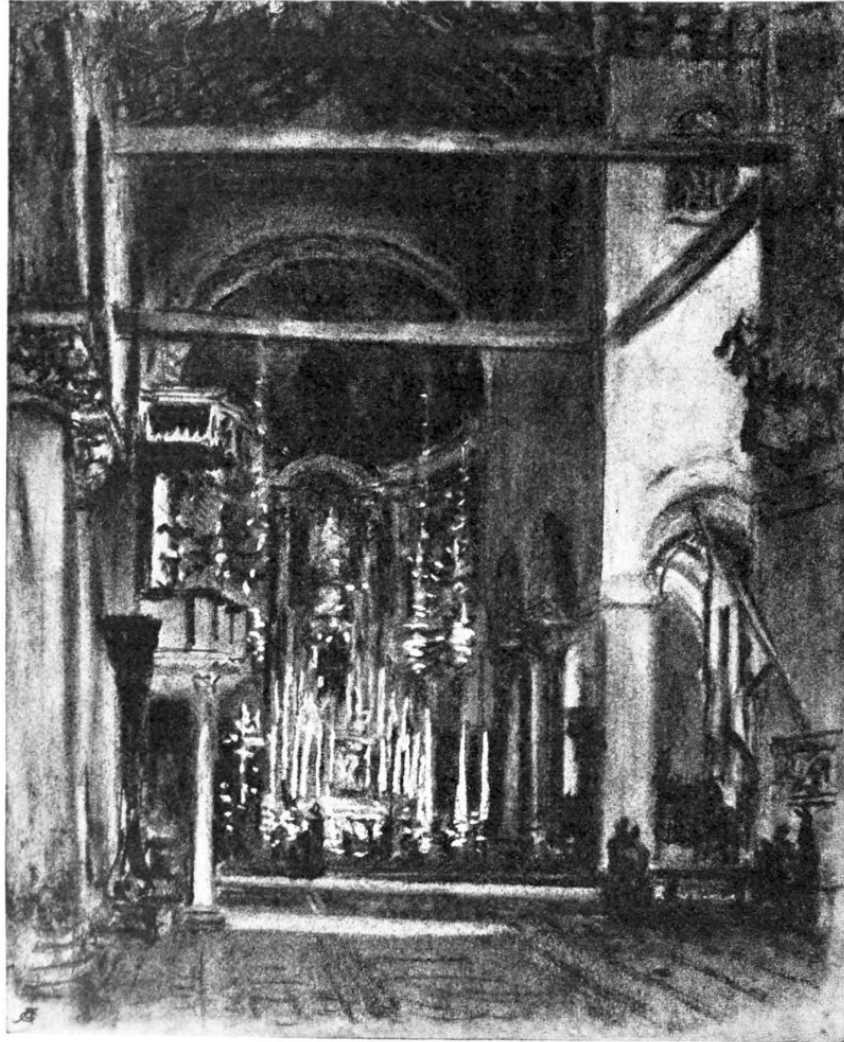
This is history, single and clear. But here springs up legend and says that Attila, who never crossed the Po, laid waste all Tuscany, and his name is a byword of terror, for blood and massacre, and destruction and all bestial ferocity. Legend says, too, that while he was besieging Aquileia, the Hun king saw the need of a fort on high ground, where there was none; and that in three days his hordes piled up the hill on which Udine stands, bringing earth in their helmets and

shields and stones on their backs. Then the Aquileians attempted to flood the country and drown out their besiegers, and they broke through the dykes that kept out the waters of the Piave; but the Huns cut down the grove of Phaëthon and made a vast dam of the trees.

It is also told by Paul the Deacon how on a certain day Attila came too near the walls, spying for a weak point, and a party of the besieged folk fell upon him unawares; but he escaped, with his bow in his hand and his crooked sword, the sword of a Scythian war-god, between his teeth, 'dire flame flashing from his eyes,' and all that his enemies had of him was his crest.

So Aquileia resisted him long, and the Huns were discouraged, until Attila saw a flight of storks flying from the walls and knew thereby that there was famine within.

Then, says the legend, the king of the Aquileians, Menappus, who seems to be quite mythical, took counsel with his brother Antiochus, how the people might escape over the lagoon before the city fell. So they set up wooden images as soldiers with helmet and shield on the ramparts, to represent sentinels, and the Huns were deceived. But one of Attila's chief warriors flew his hawk at the walls, and it settled upon the head of one of the wooden soldiers. So, when the Huns saw that the sentinel was an image and not a man, they scaled the battlements and sacked the almost deserted city and burned it.



### **THE CATHEDRAL AT MURANO**

It is told also, and the fishermen of those waters still believe the tale, that before they escaped the Aquileians dug a deep well and hid their treasures in it; and deeds of sale of land are extant, dated as late as the year 1800, in which the seller of the property reserved his right to the legendary treasure well, if it should ever be found. The truth is, however, that after the destruction of the great city and the disappearance of the Huns, many of the fugitives went back and recovered what they had hidden.

The tide of legend sweeps down the coast with the wild riders to Altinum, where mythical King Janus fights, like a Roland, on a steed that has human understanding and that

bears him out of Attila's reach, half dead of his wounds. And inland, then, towards Padua, and up to its very walls, the heroes fight; this time Attila is wounded and is saved only by his horse's marvellous speed, but on the next day the two kings meet again in the presence of their armies to decide the war in single combat.

Janus unhorses Attila, and strikes off his ear, and would cut off his head too, but five hundred Hunnish knights rush to the rescue of their king, and Janus is prisoner. But Attila's anger is roused against them. They have broken the laws of knightly combat. His honour is tarnished because his life is saved. To clear it, he sets King Janus free and hangs his five hundred knights as a vast sacrifice for atonement. Then Padua is overpowered and sacked and burned.

The myth goes on to the end in a blaze of impossibilities. Before Rimini Attila disguises himself as a French pilgrim, hides a poisoned knife under his robe, and steals into the besieged city to murder Janus. He finds him playing at dice with one of his knights, and armed from head to foot. He interrupts the game, asks questions, forgets himself, shows his wolfish teeth, and Janus recognises him by the absence of the one ear lopped off at Padua. In an instant the king and the knight overpower the great Hun and slay him on the spot; and so ends Attila, and the myth.

. . . . .

Of all this legend little enough remains, and that is best summed up in the now almost forgotten line quoted by Professor d'Ancona in his *Leggende*:—

... nata ella sola  
Di serve madri libera figluola.

'The only daughter—among many—of enslaved mothers that was ever born free.' Truly well said of Venice.



*Rom. i. 56-57.*

*554-564 A.D.*

*568 A.D.*

The chronicles tell the true story of the first beginnings, and how the people of the pillaged cities found a precarious refuge in the little archipelago. They crossed in their light boats and landed safely, and forthwith made huts and tabernacles of branches to shelter the relics of the saints which they had saved as possessions more precious than their household goods or little hoards of gold and silver. But the people themselves beached their boats high and dry and lived in them, sheltered from the weather only by awnings, just as the last of the sailor traders still live wherever they find a market on the Calabrian shore; for they hoped to go back to their homes. And so indeed they did, when the Huns departed at last; they returned to their cities and rebuilt the battered walls of Aquileia and Altinum, trusting to dwell in peace. But the second destruction was not far off: the Ostrogoths came, and the Lombards, and the people fled once more, never to return.

The unknown author of the Chronicle of Altinum carries on the tale in a most amazing compound of history, fiction, poetry and statistics. More than one scholar has indeed been tempted to surmise that this document is the work of several writers.

From them, or from the one, we learn something of the circumstances which drove the inhabitants of Altinum to take to their boats and seek a final refuge in the lagoons; and the story of the second flight, like that of the first, is fantastically illuminated by the writer's poetic imagination.

*Chron. Altin.*

'In the days of the Bishop Paul' is the only date the Chronicle gives, and doubtless that was very clear to the

first monk who took down the manuscript from its place in the convent library and first pored over its contents. In the days, therefore, when Paul was bishop in Altinum, there came out of the west a pestilence of cruel pagans, fierce Lombards, who destroyed cities in their path as the flame licks up dry grass, and who would surely have made an end of the peaceful people of Altinum if Heaven had not sent signs warning them to escape.

For one day Bishop Paul looked up to the towers and turrets of the city and saw that the birds which had their nests therein were flying round and round in agitation, and were chirping and chattering and cawing, each after his kind, as if they were gathered together in consultation. But suddenly, as Paul looked, the birds all took their flight southwards; and those that had young which could not yet fly, carried them in their beaks.

The good Bishop knew at once that this portent was a warning, and he called his flock together and told what he had seen. Then many of the people, never doubting but that he was right, fled at once towards Ravenna, and to Istria, and to the cities of the Pentapolis; but the rest fasted three days and prayed that God, by another sign, would show them the path of safety.

On the third day, therefore, a strong and clear voice was heard, saying, 'Go up into the great tower and look towards the stars.' And they went up; and the stars' reflections made paths upon the water, towards the islands of the lagoons. Then the people who had remained filled their boats with their possessions; and the good Bishop Paul led them, and the two holy priests Geminianus and Maurus, and two noble knights, Arius and Arator; and they came safely to the island of Grado, and landed there, and were saved. But soon afterwards they spread over some of the other islands and gave names to these, which recalled memories of their old home.

Now, as has been pointed out already in speaking of the first flight, the little archipelago was by no means uninhabited. Fishermen lived on the islands, and small farmers and some herdsman, none of whom, it may be supposed, were inclined to give the newcomers a warm welcome. In plain fact the people of the mainland, well provided and well armed, made an easy conquest of the islands; but in the fiction of the Chronicle it seemed necessary to account for the high-handed deed on grounds of virtue and religion, and the author forthwith launches into legend, showing us how Arius and Arator set at rest the scruples of the conquerors, if peradventure they had any.

God and the saints intervened. One day the holy Maurus looked towards one of the islands, and behold, two bright stars stood together above it, and a great voice was heard saying, 'I am the Lord, the master and the Saviour of the world. Raise thou here a temple to my glory.' But from the other star came a soft clear voice which said, 'I am Mary, the mother of God. Build unto me a church.'

There was no possibility of questioning such a form of investiture, or of disputing the right of invaders who received their orders audibly from heaven.

A little farther on there was a very beautiful island, covered with grass, whereon pastured great flocks of cattle and sheep; and Maurus asked whether perchance these herds belonged to any man, and received answer immediately. For suddenly there appeared in a rosy brightness like the dawn two figures of divine beauty; and one was that of an old man, but the other was young and little more than a lad. Then spake the old man and said, 'I am Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, who am set over all flocks, and have power to forgive all sins. I give unto thee this island, and thou shalt build a temple in honour of my name.' Also the youth spake, saying, 'I am the servant of God. I am called Autolinus, and I gave my life for Christ's sake. Build me a little church. My name is nowhere spoken

in the liturgy with those of the martyrs; I enjoin upon thee to name me in thy prayers, both night and day, and I will pray God to grant all that thou shalt ask, for thee and thine.' Moreover, the two saints, before they vanished, traced on the ground the plans of the churches they desired for themselves.

Again, a little white cloud appeared to the holy Maurus, and it was the footstool under the feet of a most fair maiden, who spake and said, 'I am Justina, whom they put to death in Padua because I confessed the name of Christ. I beseech thee, thou priest of the Lord, that thou wilt raise upon this island a little church, to honour me; wherein thou shalt sing praises to me every day and every night, as a Martyr and a Virgin, and I will grant whatsoever thou askest of me.'

Afterwards many other heavenly visions came to comfort the people of Altinum, and, amongst other saints, Saint John the Baptist also received the promise of a fair temple.

By heavenly or earthly means, therefore, the fugitives had now obtained for themselves a home, and they began to consider how they should establish themselves in it conveniently, so that it should not be taken from them. Then, such of the people as had occupied a high position in Altino were charged by the leaders to take each the command of one island—here a Marcello, there a Faliero, and farther on a Calciamiro; all names which appear again and again throughout the history of the maritime state which was then and there founded and began to live, while the Lombards were tearing down the walls of the old homes on the mainland and burning what could not be destroyed in any other way.



**THE ISLANDS**



**THE APPROACH FROM MESTRE**



# II

## THE LITTLE GOLDEN AGE

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As soon as the fugitives had given up all hope of returning to the mainland, they began that tremendous struggle with nature which built up the Venice we still see, and which, in some degree, will end only when it shall have finally disappeared again in the course of ages. The beginners displayed an almost incredible activity, which their descendants sustained without a break for centuries.

They strengthened the muddy islands with dykes and rows of driven piles; they dug canals and lined them first with timber and then with stone; they straightened the course of the currents, lest these should wash away the least fragment of land, where there was so little; they worked like beavers to win a few poor yards of earth from the restless flood.

The different tribes led strangely independent existences, though living so near together in the islands they had seized. Each one endeavoured to model the new home as much as possible upon the old, celebrating the same feasts in honour of the same saints, upon altars that enshrined the same long-treasured relics, and clinging with the affection and tenacity of unwilling exiles to the traditions and customs of the fatherland.

*Rom. i. 73.*

Though living almost within a stone's throw the one from the other, the people of Aquileia, of Altinum and of Padua held at first hardly any communication, and had little in common; but they all clung to the patriarchal life, as is easily proved by very ancient documents. It is quite certain