

# Théophile Gautier

## Travels in Italy (Voyage en Italie, 1850)

*Published with photogravure illustrations from the 1902 Bretano's New York edition,  
courtesy of the [Internet Archive](#)*



*The Grand Canal, Venice, From The Ponte Dell'accademia, With Santa Maria Della Salute  
Ippolito Caffi (Italian, 1809 - 1866)*

[Artvee](#)

Translated by A. S. Kline © [Copyright](#) 2025 All Rights Reserved

This work may be **freely** reproduced, stored and transmitted, electronically or otherwise, for any **non-commercial purpose**. [Conditions and Exceptions](#) apply.

## Contents

Parts I to V - Geneva to Milan .....	4
Parts VI to X - Milan and Venice .....	35
Parts XI to XV - Life in Venice .....	87
XVI to XX - The Accademia .....	116
Parts XXI to XXV - Wider Venice .....	148
Parts XXVI to XXXI - Padua, Ferrara, Florence .....	173

## Parts I to V - Geneva to Milan

### Contents

Translator's Introduction .....	4
Part I: Geneva – Plainpalais – A Herculean Acrobat.....	5
Part II: Lake Geneva (Lake Léman) – Brig – The Mountains.....	11
Part III: Simplon – Domodossola – Luciano Zane .....	18
Part IV: Lake Maggiore – Sesto Calende – Milan.....	24
Part V: Milan – The Duomo – The Daytime Theatre .....	30

### Translator's Introduction

**T**héophile Gautier (1811-1872) was born in Tarbes, in the Hautes-Pyrénées region of south-west France, his family moving to Paris in 1814. He was a friend, at school, of the poet Gérard de Nerval, who introduced him to Victor Hugo. Gautier contributed to various journals, including *La Presse*, throughout his life, which offered opportunities for travel in Spain, Algeria, Italy, Russia, and Egypt. He was a devotee of the ballet, writing a number of scenarios including that of *Giselle*. At the time of the 1848 Revolution, he expressed strong support for the ideals of the second Republic, a support which he maintained for the rest of his life.

A successor to the first wave of Romantic writers, including Chateaubriand and Lamartine, he directed the *Revue de Paris* from 1851 to 1856, worked as a journalist for *La Presse* and *Le Moniteur universel*, and in 1856 became editor of *L'Artiste*, in which he published numerous editorials asserting his doctrine of 'Art for art's sake'. Saint-Beuve secured him critical acclaim; he became chairman of the *Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts* in 1862, and in 1868 was granted the sinecure of librarian to Princess Mathilde Bonaparte, a cousin of Napoleon III, having been introduced to her salon.

Gautier remained in Paris during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, and the aftermath of the 1871 Commune, dying of heart disease at the age of sixty-one in 1872.

Though ostensibly a Romantic poet, Gautier may be seen as a forerunner to, or point of reference for, a number of divergent poetic movements including Symbolism and Modernism.

His *Voyage en Italie* is an account of his travels predominantly in Northern Italy, since Rome and the south are absent, and Florence is treated in brief only in the last section. The

work centres on his account of Venice, which he claimed as one of the three cities of his dreams, namely Granada, Venice and Cairo.

This enhanced translation has been designed to offer maximum compatibility with current search engines. Among other modifications, the proper names of people and places, and the titles given to works of art, have been fully researched, modernised, and expanded; comments in parentheses have been added here and there to provide a reference, or clarify meaning; and minor typographic or factual errors, for example incorrect attributions and dates, in the original text, have been eliminated from this new translation.

## **Part I: Geneva – Plainpalais – A Herculean Acrobat**

I fear that our first steps in a foreign country were marked by an act of paganism, a libation to the rising sun! Catholic Italy which understands the Greek and Roman gods so well will forgive us, though strict Geneva will perhaps consider us a little too self-indulgent. At the crack of dawn, we drank a bottle of Arbois wine, bought while passing through Poligny, a pretty town at the foot of the high Jurassic wall one must cross on leaving France. *Phoebo nascenti* (*Phoebus was born*)! His first rays had revealed to us, suddenly, below the last mountain ridge, Lake Geneva, several patches of which glimmered through the silvery morning mist.

The road descended in several twists and turns, each bend forever revealing a new and charming perspective.

Breaks in the mist allowed us to divine, as through perforated gauze, the distant peaks of the Swiss Alps, and the lake itself, as big as a small sea, over which the white sails of various vessels floated, in the early morning, like doves' feathers fallen from the nest.

We passed through Nyon, and already many a significant detail gave warning that one was no longer in France: pieces of wood shaped like rounded scales, or like tiles whose colour they almost share, cover the houses; the gables terminate in tin globes; the shutters and doors are made of boards laid crosswise and not lengthwise, as in France; red there replaces the green hue so dear to Jean-Jaques Rousseau's enthusiastic grocers; Swiss French began to appear on the signage, the names having been previously designated in German or Italian.

The road, as we progressed, ran alongside the lake, whose transparent water dies on the pebbles in a regular motion which is sometimes augmented by the eddy from some steamboat decked out in the colours of the Swiss Confederation, heading for Villeneuve or Lausanne. On the opposite side of the road, were the mountains we had just descended, over whose flanks the clouds slid like smoke from shepherds' fires. A large number of *charabancs*, light carriages where folk sit back-to-back or facing sideways, drawn by ponies or large donkeys, crisscrossed the dust. Villas and cottages multiplied, revealing beneath the shade of tall trees their tubs of flowers, their terraces, and brick walls: one feels one is approaching a city of some importance.

The idea of Madame de Staël, with her long black eyebrows and yellow turban, and her high waisted-dress in the Empire fashion, troubled us greatly while traversing Coppet.

Although we knew she had been dead for a considerable while, we were forever expecting to see her beneath the columned peristyle of some villa, with Schlegel or Benjamin Constant at her side; however, we failed to do so. Ghosts never willingly risk themselves in broad daylight; they are too coy for that.

The mist had completely dissipated, and the mountain summits shone beyond the lake like gauze laminated with silver; Mont Blanc dominated the group in cold and serene majesty, beneath a diadem of snow no summer can melt.

The movement of carriages, carts, and pedestrians became more frequent; we were only a few hundred yards from Geneva. A childish idea, that not even lengthy travels can wholly dissipate, still leads one to imagine cities according to the products that render them famous: thus, Brussels is a giant cabbage patch, Ostend an oyster bed, Strasbourg a pâté de foie gras, Nérac a terrine, Nuremberg a toybox, and Geneva a watch, set with four rubies. We imagined to ourselves a vast intricate work of timekeeping, with toothed wheels, cylinders, springs, escapements, the whole mechanism ticking, and endlessly rotating back and forth; we imagined the houses, if there were any, as double-sided cases, in gold and silver, their doors opening with watch-keys. As to the suburbs, we accepted the houses there might be made of copper or steel. Instead of windows, we conceived of an infinity of dials all marking different times. Ah well! That dream vanished like many another; Geneva, we are forced to admit, looks not at all like a timepiece, which is unfortunate!

When we entered the place, a little slowly it seemed to us for so austere, republican, and Calvinist a city, we received, in exchange for our passports, a facetious notice, commencing like the comic strips involving *Monsieur Crépin* and *Monsieur Jabot*, as drawn by that witty caricaturist Rodolphe Töpffer, with the humorous recommendation: *See below....* a host of formalities to complete.

Geneva has the serious, somewhat stiff, appearance, of Protestant cities. The houses there are tall, and uniform; straight lines, and right angles reign everywhere; everything is fashioned in squares and rectangles. Curves and ellipses are prohibited as too sensual and voluptuous: grey is welcomed everywhere, on walls and in clothing. Hairstyles, in a moment, turn into Quaker hats; one felt there must be a vast number of Bibles in the city, and very few paintings.

The only things that give Geneva a fantastic air are the metal chimneys. One could not imagine anything more bizarre and capricious. You know those acrobats that the English call *acropedestrians* who, on their backs with their legs in the air, juggle a wooden bar, or a pair of children covered in sequins. Imagine all the acropedestrians in the world rehearsing their acts on the roofs of Geneva, but in the form of bifurcated contorted, desperately-struggling, chimney pipes; their contortions must have as their cause the numerous gusts of wind that descend from the mountains, and rush through the valley. Perhaps the Piedmontese chimney-sweeps, before first travelling through France, perfected their talents in Geneva, and worked triumphs of chimney-sweeping there. The pipes are made of tin, freshly-polished and shining brightly in the sunlight. I spoke earlier about acropedestrians doing their job. Equally a routed army of knights, thrown from their steeds, their legs bent in the air, seems a good comparison also; but let us leave the chimney-pipes there.

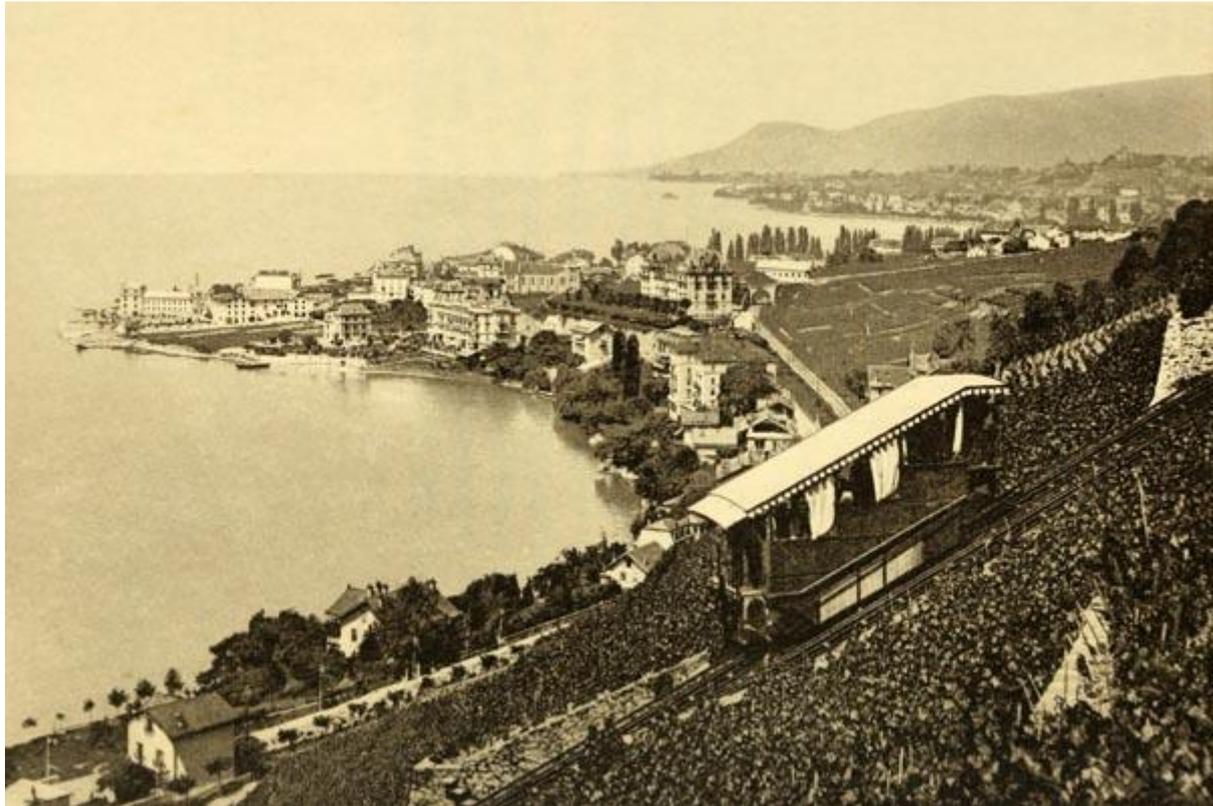
It is strange how a great name seems to populate a city. That of Jean-Jacques Rousseau pursued us the whole time that we were in Geneva. It is difficult to comprehend that the body of an immortal spirit has disappeared, that the form which enclosed sublime thoughts has vanished without hope of return: and we were distressed not to meet on some street corner the author of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, in his fur hat and Armenian clothes, with a worried and thoughtful air, his expression sad and gentle, looking to see if his dog was following him and not betraying him like humankind.

I shall say nothing regarding Saint-Pierre Cathedral, the city's main place of worship: Protestant architecture consists of four walls brightened a little by mouse-grey and canary-yellow; as such it is too plain for my taste, since, in matters of art, I am Catholic, Apostolic and Roman.

Nonetheless, Geneva, somewhat cold and stiff though it may be, holds an item of interest sufficient to send Eugène Isabey and Eugène Cicéri, William Wyld, Émile Lessore and Hippolyte Ballue, into transports of joy, and fill the office of public works with despair. I mean a group of wooden buildings on the edge of the Rhône, at the point where it exits from the lake to head for France. I recommend, in all conscience, to the watercolourists, who will thank us for the gift; nothing involved is straight or level; the various floors advance and retreat, the rooms project outwards in carved wooden lattice-work. The whole is an incredible mixture of half-timbering, planks, joists, nailed slats, trellises, and chicken-coop style balconies: all worm-eaten, cracked, blackened, mildewed, veined, bleared, frowning, and derelict, covered in leprous stains and calluses to delight a Richard Parkes Bonnington, or an Alexander-Gabriel Decamps; the windows, broken at random, and half-blocked by collapsed shards of glass, draped with garlands of tripe and pig-bladders, sweet-peas and nasturtiums, belonging to these pleasant dwellings; and paintwork in vinous, and blood-stained tones, part-effaced by the rain, completes the fierce and truculent appearance of these perilous hovels, whose reflection the Rhône, which passes beneath, with its dark-blue flow, obscures with foam.

Opposite the shacks are tanneries which cleanse calfskins, suspended from beams, in the current; they appear like drowned victims. These, if you wished to consider the matter from a Romantic and nocturnal point of view, might be travellers lured to the sinister huts we have just described by some pretty *Maguelonne*, slaughtered by the assassin *Saltabadil* (*characters in Victor Hugo's play 'Le roi s'amuse'*), and hurled into the river, from one of those upper windows seemingly dripping with blood.

Let us cleanse ourselves of these bloodthirsty images in the lake. Geneva is all Lake Geneva. It is impossible, there, to avert one's eyes or ignore its shores: every window strives to gaze towards it, and the houses stand on tiptoe, seeking to glimpse it over the shoulders of buildings more favourably sited.



*Lake of Geneva - Montreux and the Rigi Railway*

A flotilla of rowing boats, and vessels under canvas, with or without awnings, wait, near the mole where the steamboats stop, to address the whims of walkers and travellers.

Nothing is more charming than wandering over this blue tablecloth, as transparent as the Mediterranean, bordered by villas that bathe their feet in the water, and framed by layered mountains blue with distance. Mont Salève, the Dent de Morcles, and old Mont Blanc, which seems sprinkled with dust like that of Carrara marble, embroider the horizon on the Swiss side of the lake, while on the French side the last foothills of the Jura Mountains display their undulations. Fishing boats, their raised sails in the shape of open scissors, wander nonchalantly, trailing their lines or nets. Canoes, skiffs, and boats of all kinds, crewed by amateur sailors, flit from one bank to the other, in large enough numbers to make a lively tableau, but sparsely enough that they fail to overcrowd the scene.

Nonetheless, the lake, however calm and clear it may be, is not always free from danger. Its gusts sometimes mimic gales, and accidents occur. I was told of a jeweller from Paris, rich, retired from business, who had drowned, recently, along with his friend, the yacht he was sailing having been taken aback, and the boat having capsized. One of the bodies had been found, but not the other, though such clear water seems incapable of hiding its secrets. Skilled divers, descending with the aid of a stone attached to a thin cord which they severed when they wished to ascend, had searched the lake to a depth of five hundred feet, but in vain. Our boatman told us that the jeweller's corpse must have been carried away by the flow of the Rhône, which traverses Lake Geneva, or dissected by crayfish on the lake-bed, which had

prevented the corpse from returning to the surface. This story spoiled the lake a little for us, and we chose to avoid eating crayfish, under any circumstances, during our stay in Geneva.

It is our custom, when travelling, to read the billboards and notices, posted freely, and always on display to the passer-by. We viewed, on a notice giving the reports of various convicts, an idiomatic word peculiar to Geneva: it is the word *grisallant* used as an epithet instead of *grisonnant*, for *greying* eyebrows, in describing the features of some criminal or other. Our contemplation of the wall taught us that there was at Plainpalais, which is Geneva's Champs-Élysées, a fairground suitably supplied with wooden horses, wheels of fortune, and acrobats. The poster, displayed by Karl Knie of Vienna, which announced a number of acrobatic performances, particularly appealed to me. Rope-dancing, which should have its own theatre in Paris, is a most interesting attraction, and very graceful in execution, and we never understood why the enthusiasm which greets ballet-dancers like Marie Taglioni, Fanny Elssler, Carlotta Grisi, and Fanny Cerrito, disdains tightrope-dancers, who are just as light of step, and whose art requires more courage, being more dangerous.

It is on the Plainpalais side of the lake that the aristocratic districts are located. The neighbourhoods where the seditious masses live, the suburbs of Saint-Marceau and Saint-Antoine, sprawl at the other end of the city, on the other side of the Rhône bridges.

A fairly eager but calm, and compact crowd, was heading towards the city gates. In this considerable gathering of people, we noted nothing particular by way of costume. The fashions were those of France, though somewhat out of date, and provincial; we noted a minor difference, a few of the men's straw hats with black ribbons and braids of the same colour, and immense brims to the hats worn by women, brims that dip before and behind, so as to hide half of the neck, and the facial features.

The women themselves give to their French airs a North-American or Germanic twist, easier to view than to describe, and which derives from their religion. A Protestant neither sits nor walks like a Catholic, and their clothes hang differently on them. Their beauty, also, is different; they have a particularly penetrating look, though restrained, like a priest's, a cool smile, a deliberate gentleness of physiognomy, a reticent modesty, like that of a governess or a clergyman's daughter.

Herr Knie occupied a canvas enclosure, open to the heavens, and lit by a dozen lamps whose fiery tongues, stirred by the evening, breeze sometimes licked too ardently at their wooden supports.

Karl Knie, let me say at once, is a great artist, and impressed us deeply. No tightrope, stiff or slack, has supported any to compare. Perhaps you imagine a young man, slight, slender, an aerial human shuttlecock bouncing acrobatically up and down on its racket! You would be quite wrong.

Attention! The orchestra announces the performance with a triumphant fanfare; the bass-drum thunders, the double-bass hums, the cymbals quiver, the trombone bellows, the clarinet chirps, the fife squeaks; the musicians, employing the whole strength of their arms and lungs, extract from their instruments all the sonority they can; everything suggests the entry of a superior artist, the star of the troupe; a profound silence settles on the audience.

Onto the boxlike platform which serves as a stage for his acrobatics, bursts forth, impetuously, a large fellow, shaped like Hercules. He advances with an air of resolution towards the frame which supports the taut cable; he clings to it, with a strong grip, and with a leap stands upright, beside the cloth adorned with tinsel which decorates the X-shaped bars, from which the dancer departs and where he will come to rest.

Never, in Swiss stained-glass windows of the sixteenth century, or those woodcuts of Maximilian I's triumph created by Albrecht Dürer, have I seen a *lansquenet* (*mercenary soldier*) or a *reiter* (*cavalryman*) of a more masterful and more formidable turn. From his brimmed hat, similar to that of Albrecht Gessler, escaped three bold and dishevelled feathers, more contorted than the heraldic *lambrequins* (*mantling*) of a burgrave's coat of arms; his doublet was slashed in the Spanish-style, his belt clasped his stomach with some difficulty, and surely needed to be encircled with iron bands like Henri, the prince's servant, in the tale of the *Frog Prince*, so as not to burst. His collar rose up to his skull in three large folds at the nape of the neck, like a mastiff's ruff, bearing atop it a square, bold, fierce and jovial head, the head of one of Herod's soldiers, an executioner on Calvary, or, if such comparisons are too biblical for you, of heroes of the Nibelungenlied in the illustrations by Peter von Cornelius. His enormous legs, revealing knots of clenched muscles beneath his white costume, looked like oaks from the Hyrcanian Forest clad in trousers; rolling his arms with every movement, he exhibited biceps like the cannonballs of '48.

A balance-pole was thrown to this Polyphemus of the tightrope, probably shaped from a young pine torn from the mountain-side, and he began to leap about, with incredible grace, lightness and ease on the cable, that we feared might break at any moment. Picture to yourself the opera-singer Luigi Lablache on a wire wrought of brass.

This fellow, beside whom Hercules, Samson, Goliath, and Milo of Crotona would have appeared timid, soon disdained such facile exercises; he settled himself on his rope with chairs and a table, and ate a meal shared by a clown, and, to express his delight at the dessert, danced a gavotte with a child of between twelve and fifteen years old hanging from each foot. This exhibition of athletic strength, to augment a performance which seemed to require only flexibility and lightness, produced a singular effect.

His Cyclopean acrobatics were followed by a polka danced on parallel ropes, by two sisters of approximately the same size, with a good deal of grace, correctness, and precision. One of the two was really charming. She had a delicate, gentle look, and an intriguing *smorfia* (*grimace*) in place of the dancer's obligatory smile. She appeared in a pair of costumes: first in a black bodice and white skirt studded with stars, and then in a yellow petticoat, with a red bodice trimmed with little teeth which pierced our hearts. After the polka, she danced a solo on the rope, a classic series of steps, bending back and forth, as on the Opéra stage. As she finished, by striking a pose, arms stretched out, body leaning over the void, executing a *relevé*, a voice, from a corner of the room, called out: 'Higher, that's not it!' The dancer understood, blushed slightly, and with a smile bent a little, and without losing her balance made the bright white of her tights flicker beneath the gauze.

Who had uttered this exclamation? Was it some university student, a senior (*a 'bemoostes Haus'* or *'maison mossue'*) from Heidelberg, or a freshman (*a 'Fuchs'* or *'renard'*) from Jena,

in a white cap, his frock coat clasped at the waist by a leather belt, or a French *rapin* on his way to Italy in search of the naive in art, or a *plastique* of the Olympian school, or a transcendental Hegelian? It's hard to decide, and I leave the matter unresolved.

After the rope-dance, the girl performed the egg-dance; a certain number of eggs are placed on the ground in a chessboard pattern, and the dancer passes along the little alleys formed by the rows of eggs, blindfold, and without the feet touching any of the obstacles. The slightest clumsiness in doing so would deliver an omelette: Mignon, without doubt, could not have delivered his tour de force before Wilhelm Meister more adroitly than the young girl from Knie's troupe before her Geneva public, and Goethe could not have had a more charming model from which to trace Mignon's delightful face. I seemed to hear, fluttering on her lips, that melancholy song:

Kennst du das Land, wo die Citronen blühen?

Do you know the land where the lemon-trees grow?

The clown, Auriol, thwarted in his ambitions, displayed an aura of nostalgia amidst this Austrian caravan. He was French, from Nancy like Jacques Callot. Let us not forget, for one must be fair to all, a valet in red clothes, the best lackey that a trader in Swiss vulneraries or herbal teas could dream of. Oh, how inimitable his manner when stretching out a leg or straightening his back! Receive, unknown talent, the humble gift of admiration from a critic whose praise has pleased those more celebrated than yourself!

The show ended, everyone rushed off, in haste, for the city gate, which closed at a certain hour, after which time the gatekeeper required a small donation before opening it once more.

## **Part II: Lake Geneva (Lake Léman) – Brig – The Mountains**

Geneva had given us all the pleasures that a Protestant Sunday permits; a voyage on the lake, a wonderful sunset over Mont Blanc, which turned pink like the Sierra Nevada above Granada, viewed at evening from the salon of the Alameda, and a charming fairground performance beneath beautiful trees and a starry sky; all that remained for us to do was leave.

We had initially wanted to make the trip in a four-wheeler, if only to see if the *vetturino* (*carriage-driver*) described in *La Chasse de Castre* (by *Alexandre Dumas*) was a true portrait; but, fortunately, such an extravagant price was demanded of us, we having, without doubt, been taken for Englishmen or Russian princes, that the suggestion lapsed, and we realised the benefit in not being dragged along in an antediluvian sedan by horses worthy of the old *fiacres* of Paris. The speed and convenience of the journey amply compensated us for this offence against local colour.

A diligence (*stagecoach*) was to take us to Milan over the Simplon Pass; not the same one, because we were required to change horses in nigh-on every territory we crossed, the government having a monopoly on transportation; though we had no other involvement but agreeing to transfer from a Genevan coach to a Savoyard coach, which would hand us over to a Swiss coach, which would deliver us to a Piedmontese car, which would turn us over to an Austrian mail-coach. Believe not that I intend the least comic exaggeration here; this shower of diligences is the truth itself: it is always reality that is unbelievable.

Leaving Geneva, we travelled to Cologny, from where one enjoys an admirable view. Geneva is visible at the end of the lake; the Alps and Mont Blanc rise to the left (*looking towards Geneva*), while to the right one sees the distant Jura mountains. Near Cologny there is a country-house set in a most picturesque location, which belonged to Théodore Tronchin, the doctor so celebrated in the eighteenth century. It is still occupied by a member of that illustrious doctor's family.

The first Savoyard village one encounters is Douvain or Dovenia. We imagined seeing a population of young Savoyards, chimney-sweep's brush in hand, clad in knee pads, armbands and leather-bottomed trousers, as portrayed in Voltaire's verse, Joseph Hornung's paintings, and the repertoire of François Dominique Séraphin's shadow-theatre. It seemed to us that every chimney-pot was obliged to reveal a soot-smearred face, with bright eyes and gleaming teeth, its lips uttering the cry known to all little children: 'Ramoni, ramona, chimneys cleaned of soot and tar!'

Not only were the Savoyards, who call themselves Savoisiens so as not to be confused with Auvergnats, not occupied in chimney-sweeping, they were celebrating a feast-day of some kind, and were shooting at a bird perched atop a fifty-foot mast. Every successful shot was greeted by fanfares and drum-rolls.

After Douvain, one loses sight of the lake, and crosses well-cultivated land with a fertile aspect. Fields of maize with its pretty tufted ears, terraced vineyards supported by low walls, and a few fig trees with large leaves foreshadow one's approach to Italy.

Soon one encounters the lake again and follows its contours. One traverses Thonon-les Bains, and Évian, where we halted for a few moments, and which is one of the most favourable points for embracing a general view of Lake Geneva.

Never did a theatre-designer, with the exception of Charles Séchan, Jules Diéterle, Édouard Desléchin, or Joseph Thierry in collaboration with Charles-Antoine Cambon, create scenery to more wondrous effect than Évian has by the mere actions of Nature.

From the height of a terrace shaded by tall trees, one views below, in the depths, if you lean against the parapet, the treetops and disorderly roofs of wooden or flat stone tiles in the lower town. This foreground, in a warm, vigorous key, strikes a tone which provides a most excellent foil for the rest; the view terminates in vessels with tapered bows, salmon-coloured masts, and wide reefed yards, drawn up on the shore after their travels. The middle-ground is provided by the lake, and the background by the Swiss mountains, which extend twelve leagues or so.

These are the rough outlines of the picture; but what the brush would perhaps be even more powerless to render than the pen is the lake's colour. The most beautiful summer sky is

certainly less pure, less transparent. Rock-crystal and diamond are no clearer than this virgin water flowing from the neighbouring glaciers. Distance, the greater or lesser depth, and the play of light grant it vaporous hues, ideal in nature, impossible in effect, which seem to belong to another planet; the cobalt, outremer, sapphire, turquoise, or azure of the most beautiful blue eyes, are of earthly tones by comparison. Various reflections from a kingfisher's wings, or the gleaming mother-of-pearl of various shells, alone, may give some idea of them, or even certain of those blue Elysian distances in Jan Breughel the Younger's depictions of Paradise.

One wonders if it is water, sky, or the azure mist of a dream that one sees before one: the air, the waves and the earth reflect the light and mingle together in the strangest way. Often a boat, trailing its dark blue shadow, alone gives warning that what you had taken for a tract of sky is a portion of the lake. Mountains take on unimaginable shades, silvery and pearl greys; tints of rose, hydrangea, and lilac; and ash blues like Paolo Veronese's ceilings. Here and there a few white dots gleam: they are Lausanne, Vevey, Villeneuve. The reflection of the mountains shadowing the water is so fine in tone, so transparent, that one loses one's sense of objectivity; it is necessary, in order to regain it, to locate the slight shiver of silver with which the lake fringes its banks. Above the first mountain chain, the Dent de Morcles shows its two whitish pinnacles. This is where the Rhône enters the lake, the Rhône which we would follow as far as Brig.

At Saint-Gingolph, we said our farewells to Lake Geneva, whose vast riot of azure ceased for us there by terminating on the outskirts of Villeneuve. The whole day had passed like a dream, in a bath of tender blue light, a mirage, a Fata Morgana. How enchanting its harmony, how temperate its Attic grace, how ineffable its suavity, chaste its voluptuousness, mysterious its caress; how the sweetness of nature enveloped the soul!

This journey along the lake-shore reminded me of that day of celestial intoxication spent near Granada, on the heights of Mulhacen, on the same date, ten years earlier, amidst an ocean of azure light and snow.

Turning south from Lake Geneva, the road remains picturesque, though nothing can replace the effect of that immense mirror of sky mingled with water.

We followed a route lined with beautiful trees, whose freshness was maintained by the valley's shade. The cliffs rose steeply on each side to prodigious heights: one of them seemed as if it terminated in a fortress, complete with a cluster of turrets, crenelated ramparts, keep, and pepper-pot gate-towers. The snow, silvering the projections and cornices of the rock, rendered the illusion even more complete: the imagination appointed it no other than the abode of that Job whom Victor Hugo so praised.

The Rhône flows along the valley bottom, sometimes near, sometimes further away, but always yellow and turbulent, rolling stones and sand along and often shifting in its bed like an anxious patient. The river has to pass through the filter of Lake Geneva before it can acquire that deep blue which characterises it on departing the city; because, as the great poet whom we cited a moment ago declared, the Rhône is blue like the Mediterranean towards which it races, and the Rhine green like the Ocean towards which it strolls. It is unfortunate that this charming landscape is plagued by goitres. At every turn one encounters women, often very pretty, in their

traditional little hat, topped and bordered with ribbons set like little gun barrels, who are afflicted with this unpleasant infirmity. A goitre looks like that membranous pouch beneath a pelican's beak. Some are huge. Is it the shade from the mountains, the rawness of the icy water, which causes this sad deformity? That we never really discovered. Women, especially old women are more prone to it than men: nothing is more afflicting. A sufferer with a bent head, and goitred neck, stopped near our coach, grunting and wheezing. A sad picture! The disease is enough to turn a man into an animal, a creature of mere instinct.

We dined at Saint-Maurice, on the banks of the Rhône, a large fortified town of rather forbidding appearance. On the walls of the hotel, hung lithographs representing Switzerland's illustrious military men: General Guillaume-Henri Dufour surrounded by his staff, Hussy of Aargau, Eschmann, Frey-Hérosé, Pfonder of Lindenfrey, Zimmerli and others. There were also portraits of Ulrich Ochsenbein, president of the Federal Diet in 1847, and of Jakob Robert Steiger. We note this because hotel-adornments everywhere are usually purchased from the Rue des Maçons-Sorbonne, in Paris, and represent merely the four seasons, or the four corners of the world.

At Saint-Maurice, we were inserted into a ridiculous coupé in which one could neither stand upright nor bent, nor lie down, nor sit, so ingenious was its construction. This *berlingot* jolted us to Martigny, where we were taken up by a diligence. The night was foggy and icy, and we could barely discern the vast confused shapes of the mountains; half-awake we traversed Sion and, as daylight dawned, at the end of a valley dissected by torrents and rendered humid by marshland, there rose the bell towers and buildings of Brig, crowned with large tin globes, which gave it the air of a more modestly-sized Kremlin. Here the road to Simplon begins. Only a mountain ridge now separated us from that Italy whose name is so powerful, according to Heinrich Heine, that it makes even the philistines of Berlin sing 'Tirily'.

The Simplon route we were about to follow is a marvel of human genius. Napoleon, recalling the difficulty Hannibal must have had in melting the Alps with vinegar, as we are told, in all seriousness, by the historians, wished to spare the returning conquerors of Italy such labour, and had them create this miraculous path in only three years. The vinegar of ancient times must have been of incredible strength; since sixteen million kilos of powder, and ten thousand men, were scarcely enough to carve the imperceptible strip called a road in the side of this savage mountain.

The land slopes gently upwards, between the mountains on either side, so close one might believe one could touch them with a finger though they are quite far apart; but in Alpine regions, the perpendicularity of the terrain constantly deceives with regard to distance, by the perpendicularity of its planes. The range we left behind was covered in snow; it is an offshoot of the Swiss Alps. On the flanks, which seem inaccessible, even to the feet of mountain-goats, villages are suspended, who knows how, villages betrayed by their bell-towers sometimes the sole visible evidence of their presence. Chalets, lost amidst the mountains, with wooden awnings, and roofs loaded with stones for fear the wind may rip them away, suddenly reveal the unexpected presence of humankind; this is where, blocked in by ice and avalanches, the shepherds spend their winters, far from human commerce. Where you think only to find eagles and chamois, you meet reapers and mowers: agriculture rising to dizzying heights; we saw a

woman baling hay at the edge of a fifteen-hundred-foot precipice, on a meadow sloping like a roof, with a scattering of cows whose bells could be heard ringing.

Brig, on the floor of the valley, seemed no more than one of those toy-sets from Germany representing a village carved in wood. Its proportions were the same; the tin globes shone like balls of glitter in the morning sunlight. The Rhône seemed little more than a yellow thread. To the right of the road the mountainous horizon stretched as far as the eye could see, the peaks, their summits lifting one above another, forming a sublime panorama. A few snowy spires of Mont Blanc rose from the depths of this magnificent chaos. On the left, were forests with large firs of surprising vigour and beauty: the fir tree forms the grass of these mountains. It is to them as a covering of grass is to a meadow. The steep escarpment which appears clothed in a velvety manner, here and there, with patches of moss, is in fact cloaked in fir and larch trees sixty feet high. Those 'blades of grass' would make fine masts for ships; that skin-crawling cleft in the mountainside is a valley which could hide a village in its fold, and often does; this immobile whitish network, which one might take for a vein of snow, is a fierce torrent which descends swiftly, amidst a dreadful thunderous sound, unheard by us.

Nothing is more beautiful or more pleasantly grandiose than the commencement of the road to Simplon from Geneva; immensity fails to exclude charm; a certain voluptuous grace covers those colossal undulations; the fir trees are such a fresh green, so mysterious, so tender in its intensity; their attitude is so elegant, so open, so slender; their arms extend their sleeves of greenery towards you in so amiable a manner; their silvery trunks imitate columns so well; they cling so skilfully, their roots clasping the edge of some abyss or sheer wall; the streams babble so sweetly in their silvery voices beside you, among the stones and aquatic plants, the distant ones revealing such attractive blue tones; the precipices are so inviting, that I felt in a state of extraordinary exaltation, and that I could gladly launch myself, head first, into some pretty chasm.

For some time, we skirted a delightful abyss, at the bottom of which the Saltina performs foamy antics, twisting and turning in the most picturesque way. The forests of fir trees, in process of exploitation, offer a singular appearance. The tree-trunks, severed a few feet from the ground, have the appearance of the columns planted in Turkish cemeteries, and thus we wondered with astonishment at the vast number of Osmanlis buried on a Swiss mountain. Where such harvesting is recent, the cuts made by the axe, present light salmon tones which closely approach the colour of human flesh; they look like wounds caused to the bodies of those dryads the ancients thought inhabited trees. The fallen section then takes on an interesting and painful air; sometimes the ground slips from beneath its feet and it slips halfway into a chasm, held back, in its fall, by the arms of a few more firmly-rooted friends.

Here and there, in the distance, refuge-huts, marked with a numeral, and eight in number if my memory does not deceive me, awaited those travellers surprised by a storm, melting snow or an avalanche. In such places, so solitary, so seemingly lost, human forethought accompanies you, everywhere protecting you. When you think you are alone, between nature and God, drowned in the vast ocean of immensity, a roadman who humbly breaks stones and busies himself with filling the rut that might cause your vehicle to overturn, revives the general feeling of human solidarity. In deepest isolation, one of your brothers is labouring on your behalf; a

herd of goats, alarmed, climb the sheer cliffs formed by the rock, jumping from outcrop to outcrop with incredible agility, despite the cries of the goatherd recalling them; a patch of cultivated land appears suddenly in an unlikely place; a cluster of dwellings indicates that here folk love and hate, joy and suffer, live and die, as on the plain and in the city; isolated cabins signal the presence of hearts with the strength to endure the spectacle of immensity without being overwhelmed, and to remain face to face with God, beyond all human distractions.

Arriving at a place where the valley is cut by a deep trough, where all the streams and torrents that flow from the mountain traverse the road through underground conduits, we crossed a bridge whose abutments were of a prodigious height, then negotiated a bend, and began to climb the further ridge.

This was where the relay station was located, the buildings of its two sections, linked together by a covered gallery in the manner of a bridge.

The mountain to the east which had been continuously visible in the background, hid its snowy head behind the horizon. Ahead now, to the south, was the Fletschhorn with its icy cap from which torrents filtered, while behind us, to the north, rose the Schinhorn, somewhat further off, hooded with clouds. The fir-trees were sparser, the vegetation noticeably poorer. However, bold plants ever keep company with humankind, reviving the feeling of life in places where all might seem dead. Rhododendrons display their perennial greenery and beautiful flowers, which they call, there, Alpine roses: blue gentians, saxifrages, moss champions with their pink flowers, forget-me-nots like little turquoise stars bravely climb the mountain beside one, profiting from a trickle of water, a handful of earth in the hollow of a rock, a crack in the shale, the slightest favourable accident: humankind, itself, refuses to yield. We build even amidst the ice, at risk of being swept away by water and snow; our self-esteem it seems is involved in our inhabiting uninhabitable places.

We had almost reached the highest point of the road, something like six thousand feet above sea level. There was nothing now between us and the sky except the Fletschhorn glacier, from which four perpendicular torrents fell, four downpours of melted mire and foam. We could see the first of these torrents, distinctly, springing as it did from the corner of the glacier through an arch of green crystal; it was strange and beautiful to see this soapy, earthy, water flowing from the summit of the peak, and passing beneath the road, covered by a vaulted gallery lined with stalactites, appearing, now, like a natural cave; various openings allow you to see the cataract below, as it falls, thundering, into the abyss. The other three torrents roared and fled by in silvery gushes, amidst snowy foam, with unimaginable noise and turbulence. The spectacle was wholly Romantic in its savagery. The Fletschhorn, at this height, displays only bare earth, rocks, ice, snow, and torrential streams; the skin of the planet appears in all its nakedness, which some compassionate cloud hides from time to time in its cotton mantle.

From there the path began to descend. We left the Swiss side of the ridge for the Italian side. A strange thing occurred! As soon as we had crossed the ridge which separates the two regions, we were struck by an extreme difference in temperature. On the Swiss side, it was charming, gentle, warm, bright weather; on the Italian slopes an icy breeze was blowing, and great clouds like fog passed over us and enveloped us: the cold was excruciating, primarily due

to the acute contrast. The undercoat and topcoat we never failed to carry with us when we travelled in the South, scarcely sufficed to keep our teeth from chattering.

The ancient Simplon hospice could be seen at a lower level, to the right of the road leading from Switzerland; it is a yellowish building, topped with a fairly high bell-tower. The new hospice, much larger, is on the left; it receives travellers in distress or merely exhausted, and provides them with the care they need free of charge. Rich people donate something to the Church. As we passed the hospice, two priests emerged, one young the other old but vigorous, who were crossing from the Italian side; they both wore hats with rolled-up brims, short trousers, black stockings, and shoes with buckles, the ancient priest's costume, with the easy and secure manner of ecclesiastics in solidly religious countries.

The character of the mountains, which one might expect to soften and become more cheerful as one approaches Italy, appeared on the contrary to be one of extraordinary harshness and savagery. It seemed as if Nature delighted in overturning one's expectations, or wished to offer a *repoussoir*, as artists say, directing one towards the graceful perspectives succeeding. The reversal is most curious, since it is Switzerland which seems Italian, and Italy which seems Swiss, on this astonishing Simplon Pass.



*The River Doveria on the Simplon Pass*

From the point where the descent to the village of Simplon commences, there are two more leagues to cover, which is quickly done: several times we crossed an extremely noisy and convulsive torrent, over which a conduit, constructed of wooden troughs, passes, like an aqueduct, towards the meadows it supplies with water.

While travelling, we compared the mountains with the Spanish Sierras we had traversed. Nothing could be more different: the Sierra Morena, with its broad platforms of red marble, its green oaks and cork-trees; the Sierra Nevada, with its diamantine torrents in which oleanders soak their roots, with its complex folds and satin reflections the colour of a pigeon's throat, with its peaks reddening in the evening like young girls to whom one speaks of love; the Alpujarras, whose escarpments are bathed by the sea, with their old Moorish towns and watchtowers perched on inaccessible plateaus, and their slopes where the scorched turf imitates a lion's skin; the Sierra of Guadarrama, bristling with masses of bluish granite that one might think are Celtic dolmens and menhirs; they, in no way, resemble the Alps, for Nature, while deploying apparently similar material, ever produces a variety of effects.

### **Part III: Simplon – Domodossola – Luciano Zane**

The village of Simplon consists of a few houses clustered at the side of the road, and provides a degree of ease for the comfort of travellers. We halted there, and dined at a fairly clean inn. In the dining room was hung a painting on parchment, in grisaille, representing the conquest of India by the English, and which might have served as a set of illustrations for Joseph Méry's *La Guerre du Nizam*, because of the mixture of lords and Brahmins, of ladies and bayaderes, carriages and palanquins, horses and elephants, half-naked peons and lackeys in livery, of sepoy and horse-guards, which rendered the tapestry an encyclopaedia of India, pleasant to consult while awaiting the soup. Several facetious artists had chosen to add moustaches to the Grand Bayadere, a pipe to Lady William Cavendish-Bentinck, a cotton cap to the Governor-General and a Phalansterian pig-tail to the most venerable of Pandits; but these capricious ornamentations failed to destroy the general harmony. This Anglo-Indian parchment was also employed for registering and receiving the names of travellers. A few sly jesters had coupled various parties who would have been greatly surprised to find themselves linked together.

The slopes became steeper and steeper; where the road bends the valley flows into a gorge; the mountains' lateral slopes steepened dreadfully; the rocks were abrupt, perpendicular, sometimes even overhanging the road; the cliffs, which showed traces of mining everywhere, revealed that they had only offered a passage after long resistance, and that it had been necessary to ignite tons of powder to achieve this. The colours of the scenery turned darker, and light barely descended into the depths of the narrow cuttings; green patches, dark, almost black, in hue, which indicated fir-forest, striped the tawny rocks, much like a tiger's hide, and granted them a savage appearance. The streams became waterfalls, and at the bottom of the gigantic cleft, which seemed as if created by an axe-blow from a Titan, roared and whirled the river Diveria, the type of raging torrent that, instead of water, churns a mixture of granite blocks, huge stones, and sodden earth, amidst a whitish spray; its bed, much wider than the

river, in which it wallows and twists convulsively, looks akin to a street in some cyclopean city following an earthquake; it is a chaos of rocks, lumps of marbles, fragments of the mountainside which take the shapes of entablatures, architraves, sections of columns, and walls; in other places, the whitened stones form immense ossuaries; they appear like the burial-places of mastodons and other antediluvian creatures, brought to light by the passage of water. All is ruin, devastation, desolation, danger and menace: uprooted trees are twisted like blades of straw, rocks driven together shock the hearing with the fearful noise created, and yet we were there in the most favourable season. In winter, one's passage must be something of a miracle or a sheer impossibility. One should hire those designers who invented that fantastic cleft (*the Wolf's Glen*) in which the magic bullets are cast in Carl Maria von Weber's opera *Der Freischütz* to pen some sketches of the Gondo Gorge.

The Diveria, however furious and all-consuming it may appear, nonetheless rendered a great service to humankind; without its efforts those colossal masses could not have been split. Its water, brooking no obstacle, paved the way for the engineer. The road follows a rough outline of its course. Torrent and road mutually coexist. Sometimes the torrent encroaches on the road, sometimes the road encroaches on the torrent. Sometimes a cliff raises a gigantic rampart in opposition that could not be crossed or diverted; at those places a cutting, pierced through the rock, with chisels and explosives, removed the difficulty. The Gondo cutting, pierced by two openings which render it the most admirable and melodramatic of semi-subterranean passages, is the longest, and follows on from that of Algaby. It is six hundred feet long, and carries a plaque opposite one of the side openings, bearing the short and noble inscription: *Ære Italo 1805, Nap. imp.*

Near its exit, the Frasinone and two other torrents, flowing from the Rossbode Glacier, rush, furiously, into the abyss with a dreadful noise. The road runs along a ledge projecting over the chasm. The rock walls, rough, black, bristling, dripping, and out of true, narrow even further, and prevent one seeing, between their summits, two thousand feet higher, anything but a narrow strip of sky which shines brightly, far distant from you, like a ray of hope. Below all is night; cold and deathly; never a shaft of sunshine falls there. It is the most savagely picturesque place in the pass.

Through this scene of natural disorder, rolls the road, bending, almost always, at right angles and most suddenly. Although, in Spain, I had, three times, descended this kind of roller coaster, called a *descarga*, at the triple gallop, amid the cries of the *zagal*, the *mayoral*, and the *delantero*, amidst a storm of whip-blows, harness-bells, and insults, I could not defend myself from a certain degree of emotion in tumbling down thus, on three wheels, the fourth restrained by a brake-shoe which gripped badly, the horses, barely under control, snorting above the void, down very steep slopes lacking a parapet in almost all the most dangerous places. It seemed we would overturn at any moment; however, that failed to occur, and the tips of the larches or rocks rising from the depths of the abyss were deprived of the pleasure of impaling us. During the winter season, sleds are employed, since, say the guides, if a sled slides into the abyss, one has time to throw oneself clear: a most striking benefit!

After traversing bold bridges, and prodigious underground passages, there being one where the whole weight of the mountain presses on a mere pile of masonry, we arrived at a slightly

less-restricted portion of road. The valley widened, the Diveria broadened out, much more at its ease, the banks of cloud and mist dissipated in thinner streaks. Light filtered less stingily from the sky; the grey, green, harsh, and icy tints which characterise Alpine horrors, warmed a little. A few houses were emboldened enough to show their noses through the clumps of trees on the less steep stretches, and not long afterwards, we reached Iselle, a small village where we encountered the first Piedmontese customs-house.

The customs-house is a building surrounded by an arcaded portico supported by grey granite columns. I noticed a sundial on the wall, its role somewhat of a sinecure, since it must seldom feel the sun's rays. It bore the following inscription: *Torna, tornando il sol, l'ombra smarrita, ma non ritorna più l'eta fuggita*: with the returning sun, the lost shadow returns, as ever, but the time we have lost returns to us never. An Italian *conceit* (*conceit*) is already at play with regard to philosophical thought in the words *torna, tornando, ritorna*. Oh, how much starker, and more terrible, was the warning that the dial of the church at Urrugne, on the border with Spain, once gave me, with its terrifying comment on the flight of time: *Vulnerant omnes, ultima necut*: all things wound, the last kills! Gnomons and dials, we understand your language; and our passports bear the stamp: *Vivere memento*: remember to live. As we pass before you, we hasten our steps, even if we are weary, and have found a pleasant place to pitch our tent; for we know we must hurry to view this earth, which will soon absorb us in her vast embrace.

The landscape brightened, and became more cheerful. Carts and oxcarts passed to and fro, country folk appeared from the byways; the women, quite pretty, their skirts with a broad red band above the hem, gazed at us from wide southern eyes. White villas, bell-towers rising amidst seas of greenery; vines spreading their cradling garlands; one felt, by a certain elegance, that one was no longer in Switzerland. The Diveria continued to flow in its stony bed, but at a respectful distance, like some rough, uncultivated companion who, at the entrance to the city, prefers to leave you; yet the roadway studded here and there with enormous stones where an arch of the bridge had previously washed away, testified to its poor character. Even Napoleon, who built for eternity, could not construct a bridge strong enough to defy the head-butts from its torrent: this graceful valley is named Dovearo.

A rather singular, and un-Italian detail, at least to our northern ideas, was the bourgeois umbrella, the patriarchal *parapluie*, carried by all the people we encountered, men, women and children; the very beggars themselves bore an umbrella. We soon learned why.

At the last bend in the road, stands a chapel overlooking a cemetery; then one arrives at the Crevola bridge, completing all Simplon's prodigies with its marvellous construction. This bridge, with its two arches supported by a pier and abutments, of immense height since the cross of the church located below barely reaches the balustrade, heads the valley of Domodossola, which can be traversed from there in its entirety.

Next to the stone bridge, a wooden footbridge over the Diveria serves to connect the village's houses scattered on either bank.

Italy presented itself to us in an unexpected aspect. Instead of the azure sky and warm orange tones we had dreamed of, though failing to consider that, after all, northern Italy could scarcely possess the climate of Naples, we met with a cloudy sky, vaporous mountains,

perspectives bathed in bluish mist, like a view of some place in Scotland, done by an English watercolourist, a moist, verdant, velvety landscape worthy of being praised by a Lake poet.

Though not the picture we had imagined, the one we had before our eyes was no less beautiful; the mountains blurred by the clouds that dissolved in rain, the green flats strewn with villas, the road lined with houses festooned with vines supported by granite pillars, the gardens enclosed by upright stone slabs, formed, despite the storm which delivered a downpour, a graceful and magnificent ensemble. Already, every detail of construction revealed an instinct for beauty, and an attention to form, which exists neither in France nor in Switzerland.

We were approaching Domodossola, which we did not delay in entering, in pouring rain, which, for reasons that we said earlier, caught no one unprepared. The square in Domodossola, in the form of a trapezoid, is quite picturesque, with its archways on squat pillars, its projecting balconies, its overhanging roofs, its columned galleries, and its pavilions topped with weathervanes.

The inn where the stagecoach halted was painted, in the Italian fashion, with crude frescoes, or rather daubs in tempera, representing landscapes interspersed with palm trees and exotic plants. Round its central courtyard, as in a Spanish patio, a gallery with greyish columns reigned. It was seven in the evening; we were to leave at two in the morning; and it was raining like a latter-day Flood. We had dined in the village of Simplon, so the recourse of spending time over a meal was denied us. We asked the hotel waiter if by chance there was something of interest to attend in the town. The theatre was closed, and the impresario who had mounted his puppet-play there, had completed the final performance the day before; but he had not yet departed Domodossola. We had the idea of organising an evening for ourselves and, accompanied by a guide who thought we were mad, we leapt the puddles, in a dense shower of rain, in search of the *marionnettista*. While walking, we tried to take in various aspects of the town. In the fading daylight, we were able as yet to observe pious pictures on the walls, and statuettes of badly-painted madonnas, lit by lamps.

One of these frescoes took as its subject the Holy Virgin elevating souls from purgatory, accompanied by Saint Gervasius and Saint Protasius (*the patron saints of Milan*). Such representations are common in the streets and along the roads of Italy; at every step there are little monuments, with calvaries in relief, painted in natural colours, dedicated to Our Lady, guardian-angels, or devotions particular to the specific area.

The puppeteer was not at home; he had gone to dine at the *osteria* (*wine-bar*), and, though there was a certain cruelty involved in disturbing a poor man drinking his glass of red wine before a morsel of fried polenta, we were filled with the courage engendered by our whim, and Luciano Zane (for that was the impresario's name) agreed for twenty francs, half his normal takings, to give us a special performance, being charmed, though a little surprised, by our caprice. He asked for an hour to gather together his orchestra, warn his partner, dress his actors, mount his set, and light the room.

After an hour, through the relentless rain, we walked to the theatre. A lantern was lit over a sign indicating the entrance that read: Performance Here. The town's female urchins, whom we allowed in, had already filled the benches, and it was a pleasure to see the black eyes

sparkle, and the pretty pink mouths smile, in the light of the lamps, repeated by the mirror placed behind to reflect them. Nothing was simpler than this auditorium; four whitewashed walls, a few benches, a wooden platform, and the puppet-theatre raised by three or four feet, on trestles. Its curtain, due to that vague memory of the artistic tradition which never fades in Italy, recalled the famous fresco *Aurora*, by Guido Reni, which can be admired at the Palazzo Pallavicini-Rospigliosi, in Rome, the engraving of which is popular, though this was in the strangest Etruscan, sugary-brown style to be found anywhere.

The orchestra, composed of the usual four musicians, one of whom beat time strongly with his foot, played a short overture, and the curtain rose to our great satisfaction, and that of all the little girls, who also rose somewhat, the better to view the performance.

Firstly, *Girolamo, Caliph for Twenty-Four Hours*, or *The Living Who Pretended to be Dead*, was performed; the tale of that drunkard from the *Thousand and One Nights* who was transported to the palace by Harun al-Rashid and his faithful Jafar mingled together with a comic-opera plot worthy of Eugène Scribe and Henri de Saint-Georges, and which perhaps derived from their collaboration. Girolamo, who spoke in the Piedmontese dialect, while the other actors delivered their words in purest Italian, wore a coloured French outfit the colour of currants, and a tousled wig embellished with a grotesquely braided pigtail. His grimacing mask showed a twisted mouth, and eyes starting from his head; he stammered, gesticulated and struggled like a man possessed. Girolamo is a character who reappeared in several acts, as Girolamo the music-master, Girolamo the doctor despite himself: he is a sort of Sganarelle (*see Molière's play 'Le Médecin malgré lui'*), but more cunning, meaner, less of an ass. In certain ways, he resembles Mayeux (*a grotesque character created by Charles-Joseph Traviès de Villers*): he is sensual, a seducer, a courtier, and where necessary a deceiver, all this with a certain stamp of stupidity and rusticity that the puppeteer, who animated this *nervis alienis mobile lignum* (*wooden mobile worked by alien fingers*), conveyed very effectively; every entrance Girolamo made was therefore greeted with great bursts of laughter.

It makes a strange spectacle, and one that soon takes on disturbing reality, this representation by means of marionettes. Never did a caricaturist create a more bitter parody of life. Hogarth, Cruikshank, Goya, Daumier, Paul Gavarni, none achieve this depth of involuntary irony. How many famous actors would blush with vexation if they saw their false, mannered gestures, their studied poses in front of the mirror, repeated with a mechanical stupidity crueller than all the criticism in the world! Is this not, moreover, the whole secret of human comedy? A few dozen automatons lacking minds and hearts, motley pieces of wood adorned with tinsel, to which two or three hidden hands grant a phantasm of existence, and which are made to speak, at will, in voices they themselves do not possess.

Luciano Zane and his partner gave utterance to Girolamo, Harun-al-Rachid, Jaffar, and various other characters; a woman's voice, contralto in tone, lent its powers to the princess and the odalisques: it was the voice of Luciano Zane's wife, perched on a bench, behind the backcloth, beside her husband.

The scenery was not too badly done, and by an exaggeration of perspective, looked like the views created by children's optical toys. The interior of the Caliph's palace showed an imaginative effort to portray oriental luxury; Africans bearing torches were depicted, acting as

caryatids and supporting a ceiling reminiscent of the Alhambra. The main attraction was followed by a mythological ballet, *The Revenge of Medea*, regarding which the choreographer had failed to respect Horace's precept that Medea should not slaughter her children in public (*Ars Poetica*:185); because the sorceress immolated, with the wildest fury, two resilient little dolls, forming a group which in no way recalled the painting by Eugène Delacroix (*Medea About to Kill Her Children: Louvre*). So as not to grieve some dancers we know, we will not describe the *pas seul* and *pas de deux* of the performers, which equalled Arthur Saint-Léon for elevation, and threatened the walls and scenery, at every moment. But what lovely attitudes in a constrained compass, and what savage choreography!

The ballet over, we dived backstage. Luciano Zane showed us his repertoire composed of several manuscripts in Italian with interlinear translations in dialect; the actors and their wardrobes were ranged tidily in various drawers; there they were, lying side by side in complete concord, the high priest, the king, the queen, the princess, the Caliph, Girolamo, the good genie, the evil genie, Death, David and Goliath, the Knight and his Lady, all the characters of that little world of automatons; the clothes with their sequins, piping, gauze, and frills, gleamed.

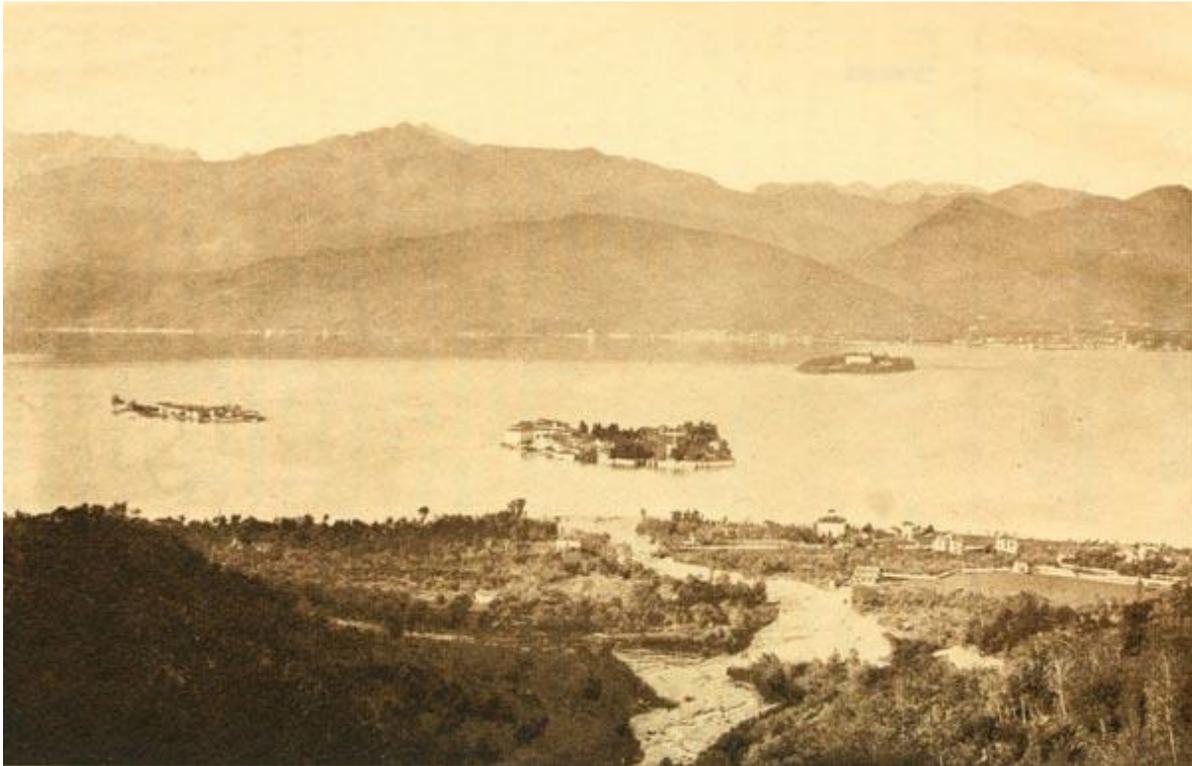
The sight made us think of the opening of Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, where he recounts his childhood passion for puppetry, and where, in the evening, he brings Mariane, the actress with whom he is in love, and who perhaps anticipates a different kind of present, the figurines which entertained him so much in his youth and developed in him a taste for the theatre. He explains to the young woman at length the character, and role, of each doll, while she looks longingly at her bed from time to time and ends by falling asleep on his shoulder: a wise warning which one should profit from.

We returned, delighted with Luciano Zane, who writes his own plays, paints his own decorations, creates and clothes his own puppets, until we were told that the greatest talent in that genre, the illustrious, incomparable, and never to be praised highly enough practitioner of the art, was a certain Famiola (*Gaspare 'Giuseppe' Colla, whose puppet-protagonist was Famiola*) of Varallo, an admirable man whose puppets' eyes and mouth moved, who did not recite but improvised, making political allusions of great finesse and incredible audacity, a charming man, addressing to the women, of whom his theatre was always full, a thousand jests and bon mots that made them laugh till they cried; he presented the taking of Peschiera (1848) with cannons, mortars and uniformed soldiers in exact detail; he made perfect little dancers perform, who made you die of love when they danced the *saltarello*, twisting their little wooden bodies about; Famiola, in sum, was the best of all: he only possessed one fault, that of being in Pallanza (*at the Marionette theatre of Casa Borromeo, on Isola Bella*) to the east of us, beside Lake Maggiore, which he might well have recently left. We dreamt of interrupting our journey, and setting ourselves to chase after Famiola, except that, before following him to the ends of the world to locate him, we had word that we were to take our places in the diligence. Instead of following Famiola, as we wished, we departed for Milan. It was wiser to do so; but, while being driven through the darkness, we still dreamed of beautiful puppets who, with extravagant gestures, cavorted amidst our slumbers.

## Part IV: Lake Maggiore – Sesto Calende – Milan

The rain continued, and the vague light of dawn drowned in clouds so low that they almost touched the earth and merged with the vapours that rose from the ground. We twice crossed a small torrential river, already swollen by the storm, by ferry, and, when day dawned, we were on the banks of Lake Maggiore, above Baveno; the water, agitated by the night's troubled weather, undulated in an agitated manner, and the lake maintained a strong swell like the sea. However, the sky was clearing ahead of us; though huge grey and black clouds, still sending down gusts of rain, had piled against the mountains on the far side of the lake. These mountains, lively in hue owing to the vegetation covering them, highlighted the vaporous peaks of Monte Rosa, and those above the Simplon and Saint Gotthard passes, visible in the background; their reflections turned the waters brown, the landscape seemed severe; Lake Maggiore, which we had imagined to be a golden cup filled with azure, possessed a tempestuous and hostile countenance. We found beauty where we had expected grace.

Our route bordered the lake, and waves licked the roadway; we progressed beside an endless series of gardens, and villas with white peristyles, roofed with rounded tiles, and of terraces garlanded with lush vines, supported by granite props. There, granite fulfils the function of fir-wood at home. It is used for fencing, piles, and even plank-like slabs, on which washerwomen soap laundry by the lake, on their knees as if to ask its forgiveness for this outrage. On these terraces, often of several tiers, which support well-tended gardens, all kinds of flowers and shrubs flourish. We noted on several occasions, and not without astonishment, for it was the first time we had encountered the like, masses of gigantic hydrangeas, which, instead of displaying the pink or mauve colours common in France, offered charming shades of azure: these blue hydrangeas really struck us, since blue is the chimerical dream of horticulturists, who seek the blue tulip, the blue rose, the blue dahlia, without finding them, the number of flowers of that colour being extremely limited. I write this trembling with fear, lest I am scolded by Alphonse Karr, who is unforgiving where literary botany is concerned. But the hydrangeas of Lake Maggiore are undeniably blue. We were told that the colour was obtained by growing them in ericaceous compost. Such is the advice of the gardeners of the Borromean Islands, which must be good advice, since all these hydrangeas the colour of the sky, were magnificent. The same result can also be achieved by sprinkling the earth with iron salts.



*Lake Maggiore - The Borromean Islands*

The Borromean Islands, three in number, Isola Madre, Isola Bella, and Isola dei Pescatori (along with two islets), are located in the eastern bay of the lake, which forms a kind of horn whose tip is turned towards Domodossola. The islands were originally bare and barren rocks. Vitaliano VI Borromeo had fertile soil brought there, and constructed gardens with a European reputation. I say constructed, deliberately; since masonry plays a wide role there, as in almost all Italian gardens, which are more works of architecture than gardens. There are more pieces of marble planted there than shrubs, and Vignola (*the architect Giacomo Barozzi*), had a greater influence upon the isle than André le Nôtre, or Jean de la Quintinie. Isola Madre like Isola Bella, is composed of an ascending series of receding terraces dominated by a palace. Isola Bella, which can be seen very distinctly from the road, is adorned with turrets, spires, statues, fountains, porticos, colonnades, vases, and all the richest architectural decoration. There are even trees such as cypresses, orange-trees, myrtles, lemon-trees, citrons, cedars and Canadian pines; but it is obvious that the vegetation is no more than an accessory; the simple idea of placing greenery, flowers and grass there, only dawned later, like all natural ideas. Isola dei Pescatori, whose rusticity makes a happy contrast with the somewhat pretentious grandeur of Isola Madre and Isola Bella, bathes the feet of its arcaded houses in the water.

These islands have been the subject of enthusiastic descriptions which they do not justify when seen from the shore. The ten terraces of Isola Bella, crowned by a unicorn, or terminating in a Pegasus, have a theatrical aspect which hardly suits the word *humilitas*, the motto of the Borromean family, inscribed in every corner. Isola Madre, with its seven embankments, supports a square place, tedious in its symmetry, and we were surprised that it is so warmly

celebrated. There, one finds the ideal and prototype of the French garden as it was understood in the days of Louis XIV, a garden which Antoine, Boileau's gardener, would have loved. The Romantic imagination, with all due respect to Jean-Jaques Rousseau, who wished to place his *Julie* there, would do well to choose another site for their heroines; this one would better suit Madame de Lafayette's princesses.

It is in Belgirate, a little before Arona, that Alessandro Manzoni, the illustrious author of *Promessi sposi* (*The Betrothed*) lives. He is often seen sitting in front of his door, facing the lake, watching the passers-by. He has a benevolent, venerable, distinguished face, whose lean outlines recall the visage of Alphonse de Lamartine. Each day, whatever the weather, one of his friends, some profound philosopher or metaphysician, visits him, in order to commence one of these elevated discussions which find no solution here below, since they speak of the high mysteries of the soul, of the infinite and of eternity.

The lake, and the road, are very lively: the lake with fishing boats, passing yachts, and the pyroscaphes (*steamboats*) which ply the route between Bellinzona at the northern end of Lake Maggiore and Sesto Calende at the southern end; the road with oxcarts, carriages, and pedestrians armed with the inevitable umbrella. The countrywomen, sometimes pretty, are afflicted with goitres as in Valais; wherever they obtain, the proximity of mountains and snow water produce the same effects.

Approaching Arona, one sees on the hill to the right the Sancarlone, the colossal statue of San Carlo Borromeo, which dominates the lake; it is the largest statue created since the Colossus of Rhodes, or that of Nero, in the Golden House. The saint, posed in a simple and noble attitude, holds a book in one hand and with the other seems to bless the land that he protects and which extends at his feet. One can climb, within, to the head of this colossus, which is made of forged and cast iron, by a staircase made in the mass of masonry with which it is filled. This giant statue, which gradually emerges from the woods with which the hill is covered, and which ends by dominating the horizon like a solitary watchman, produces a singular effect.

Arona, where we halted for lunch, has a completely Spanish air. The houses possess projecting roofs and balconies, iron-grilles on the lower windows, painted frames, and Madonnas on the walls. The church, in which there are beautiful paintings by Gaudenzio Ferrari, and which we lacked the time to visit, recalls the churches of Spain. In the inn, we found the interior courtyard decorated with columns and galleries as in Andalusia, and a thousand similar striking details.

The lake ends at Sesto Calende. The Ticino pours into Lake Maggiore at this point. Sesto-Calende is on the far bank, and we crossed the river by ferry, since the road to Milan passes through that little town. While the stagecoach was positioned in the loaded vessel, a weird, little old man, grimacing, with head tilted and fingers involved in extravagant exertions, performed a popular air, with a melody both joyful and melancholy, on a violin which was not from Cremona despite that town neighbouring on Milan. Encouraged by the donation of a small coin, he continued to play throughout the passage, and we made our entry to Sesto Calende to the sounds of music, which made us appear very dashing.

We quite liked Sesto Calende. It was market-day, a favourable circumstance for a traveller: because a market brings a characteristic crowd of people from the depths of the countryside who would be very difficult to observe otherwise. Most of the women wore their hair in the traditional style to charming effect, braided, carefully coiled above the nape of the neck, and secured with thirty or forty silver pins arranged in a halo and standing up above the head like the teeth of a comb; one more large pin, decorated at each end with an enormous metal oval and passed through the coils, completes this adornment, which reminded us of the women of Valencia. The pins, called *spontoni*, are quite expensive, and yet we have seen poor women, and young girls, wearing their hair like this despite their frayed skirts, and bare dusty feet; they doubtless sacrifice essential items to purchase this luxury. But is not a woman's primary need that of being beautiful, and are not silver pins preferable to shoes? We were so delighted not to see them wearing those dreadful cotton kerchiefs from Rouen, which they had the right to employ according to the current fashion, that we could have kissed them, out of love for the tradition; the pretty ones of course. The men, though poorly dressed, were not in blouses, a thing which rendered us happy, and compensated for the deep pain that we experienced in the province of Gipuzcoa, on encountering that hideous garment unexpectedly, when we attended the Bilbao bullfight the previous year: yet some wore the *calanes* hat, with a turned-up brim, as in Spain, and their tanned complexions harmonised with that female hairstyle so superior to those rolls of hair, or explosions of curls à la Constance Pipelet, with which women, generally, believe they must crown themselves.

The tiled roofs ahead, the whitewashed walls, the complicated grilles on the windows, gave Sesto Calende an appearance far closer to Gipuzkoa's Irun or Hondarribia, than one might think: the stalls burdened with watermelons, tomatoes, pumpkins, and coarse pottery, already had a very southern appearance; the annual whitewash on the walls of the houses had respected their frescoes some of which are quite old, and which display pious sentiments. One of these paintings, which presented itself to the eye on descending from the Ticino ferry, was a Madonna carrying the child Jesus in her arms: an inscription which I copied gives the date, *Hoc opus fecit fieri Antonius Varallus, XIII Martis 1564*. I also noticed on the apse of the church a Christ in a petticoat, like the Christ of Burgos.

Austrian rule began at Sesto Calende. The other shore of the lake is Piedmontese. It is in Sesto Calende that we encountered, for the first time, the tight blue trousers and white tunics of the Hungarian military, a uniform many examples of which one sees in the Kingdom of Lombardo-Venetia that we were going to explore. Our luggage was inspected, but summarily and without the trouble to be expected according to traveller's tales. We were then asked for our passports, which were returned to us very politely after a few minutes spent, awaiting them, in a room decorated with maps and views of Venice, and whose window overlooked a courtyard populated with half-plucked chickens, with the most laughably fierce yet pitiful physiognomies in the world. These miserable poultry, ready for the spit, pecked about gravely with a scattering of feathers on their backs. However, as regards this promptness regarding the passports, I must add that our travel details had already been sent ahead from Paris, and copied into all the registers; thus, we travelled quickly, having only been detained for a day in Geneva.

Let me not complete my description of Sesto Calende without giving a portrait of a young girl who stood on the threshold of a shop. The dark interior provided a strong warm background, from which she emerged like a Giorgione portrait. We saluted, in her, southern beauty in its purest form. Her black eyes shone like coals beneath her amber-coloured forehead, amidst her dull pallor. She owned to that uniform complexion, that *faccia smorta* which is in no way due to sickness, and which indicates that passion has concentrated all its owner's blood in the heart. Her dense, coarse, shiny hair, curled in small waves, rose on her temples, as if the breeze had lifted it, and her neck joined her shoulders in a simple but powerful line. She, tranquilly, allowed us to gaze at her without anger or coquetry, thinking us painters or poets, perhaps both, and granting us the gift of her unintentional pose.

The Austrian postillion wore a rather picturesque costume, a green jacket with yellow and black aiguillettes, good strong boots, a hat rimmed with copper, and at his side that hunting horn which often echoes in Schubert's melodies. A thing worthy of note was that the postillion, who in every country advances civilization in the form of the post, since civilization and circulation are, so to speak, synonymous, is one of the last adherents of local colour. He carries the English about in their mackintoshes and waterproofs, while retaining his colourful and characteristic livery; the past cracking its whip urges on the future.

From Sesto Calende to Milan, the road is lined with vineyards, and plantations of trees displaying the most vigorous and luxuriant vegetation. Their branches extend and block the view, and we advanced between two walls of verdure, bathed by streams of flowing water.

In Somma Lombardo, there is a very beautiful church facade, and within the church various frescoes in a gentle and pleasant tone, although of a taste signifying artistic decadence. For those of us accustomed to the rancidities of oil painting, the species of flower in these frescoes offers a fresh charm. On the road, we frequently encountered, in small or isolated groups, artillery vans, and Austrian soldiers travelling in both directions; they looked sad and gentle, and seemed overwhelmed by nostalgia. Despite their reserved appearance, they produce, even on the stranger, an unpleasant effect; it is painful to see the beak of the Austrian eagle on the edge of this beautiful country, and yet the conquerors do not affect a proud or triumphant attitude; they even seem as if wishing to hide, and occupy as little space as possible; but German phlegm is incompatible with Italian liveliness: it is a question of antipathy as much as patriotism.

Passing through Gallarate and Rho we reached Milan, in two relays. A magnificent avenue of trees announced that we were approaching the city, which appeared very majestic from the north. A triumphal arch (*Porta Sempione*), between the legs of which that of the Carrousel in Paris could pass, and which competes in grandeur with the Arc de Triomphe, gives this entrance a monumental character that the rest of the city does not belie. On the summit of the arch, an allegorical figure, Peace or Victory, commands a bronze chariot drawn by six horses. At each corner of the entablature, horsemen flourishing wreaths make their brazen mounts stamp; two colossal figures of river-gods leaning on urns flank the gigantic stone rectangle which contains the votive inscription, and four groups of double Corinthian columns mark the divisions of the monument, support the cornice and separate the archways, three in number; the central arch being of prodigious height. This gate passed, we crossed the military field, which seemed to us

almost as large as the Champ de Mars. To the left is an immense amphitheatre, intended for manoeuvres or open-air performances; at the far end rises the old castle (*Castello Sforzesco*), and further off, silhouetted against the blue sky, like a silver filigrane, the white silhouette of the Duomo, which lacks the dome shape; but duomo, in Italian, is a generic term, and does not necessarily represent one's idea of a dome.

As soon as we entered the streets, we felt, due to the elevation of the buildings, the bustle of people, the cleanliness, and the general air of ease, that we were in a vibrant city, a rare thing in Italy, where there are so many moribund townships; numerous carriages sped along flagstone tracks, each forming a kind of stony railway-line made of pebbles embedded in the pavement. The houses looked like mansions, the mansions looked like palaces, and the palaces like temples; all was large, regular, majestic, even a little over-emphatic. One saw nothing but columns, architraves and granite balconies. The whole placed it somewhere between Madrid and Versailles, with the cleanliness that Madrid lacked when we visited; this resemblance to a Spanish city which I have already spoken of struck us forcibly at every step, and I cannot help but mention it once more, since no one, as far as I know, has yet noted it; large yellow and white striped blinds were attached to the windows, the shop-fronts displaying awnings of the same colour which were reminiscent of Spanish *tendidos*. Middle-class women, or those who are not in formal dress, wear the *mezzaro*, a kind of black veil that plays the role of a mantilla; the illusion would have been almost complete, if the presence of the Austrians had not caused its destruction.

The city's best hotel, the Hôtel de Ville, in the *Corsia de Servi* (*Corso Vittorio Emanuele II*) was pointed out to us as the place to stay, a hotel which deserves its reputation. It is a palace which could accommodate more than one prince. In our travels, we saw crowned heads certainly less well housed. Its facade is a highly commendable piece of architecture, decorated with pilasters, consoles and busts of the great men of Italy, painters, poets, historians, warriors; the staircase, worthy of a royal residence, is covered, from top to bottom, with marble, stucco, and paintings of incredible richness and astonishing execution; the ceiling, above all, is remarkable: it represents different mythological subjects, with grisailles, bas-reliefs, balusters, and flowers, done with a brilliance of touch to make Diaz de la Peña envious. All the rooms are decorated with the same care and taste: sometimes there are cylindrical mouldings, two or three masks and a few other decorations in the style of Pompeii; sometimes rocaille ornamentation, flamboyant and exquisitely elaborate, or a wealth of monochromes and Limoge enamels, imitated to deceive the eye, or tapestries which shimmer like silk or shine like velvet, with boxes, rosettes, and arabesques of an inexhaustible caprice done in rare relief.

The smallest corridors reveal their own magnificence and interest: as for the dining-room, it is of overwhelming luxury; eight colossal caryatids of alternating gender watch you eat your meal, and intimidate you with their fixed blank gaze. They support a ceiling whose compartments are of a wild richness. There are festoons, pierced features, pendants, imitations of precious stones, and gilding more brilliant than real gold. These decorations, of which we have not the least idea in France, were made by a certain interior decorator named Alfonso, who had died two years or so before. That is all we could learn regarding him. I have described the hotel in detail, which may convey some idea of Milan's luxuriousness. We stayed there for

two days, admirably housed, fed, and attended to, for a very reasonable price. It is so common for travellers to slander their hosts, and the inns where they stay, that I will hereby grant this superb establishment the justice it deserves. I shall, no doubt, read enough descriptions of an altogether different kind providing an interesting contrast.

## **Part V: Milan – The Duomo – The Daytime Theatre**

The Duomo is naturally the immediate preoccupation of every traveller who arrives in Milan. It dominates the city; it is the centre, the main and wondrous attraction. This is where all go, at once, even at night and with no moon in the sky, in order to gain a few first impressions.

The *Piazza del Duomo*, irregular in its shape, is lined with houses of which it is customary to speak ill; every traveller's guide asks that they be razed, in the manner by which the Rue Rivoli was created, to form a large symmetrical square. I am not of that opinion. The houses, with their massive pillars, their saffron-coloured awnings, facing buildings without particular order and of unequal heights, form an excellent foil for the cathedral. Buildings often lose more than they gain from being decluttered. One is able to convince oneself of this by considering several monuments of Gothic architecture which were less harmed by the booths and hovels glued to them than was thought; such is not, moreover, the case with the Duomo, which is completely isolated, while I believe nothing is more favourable to a palace, church or any coherent building, than being surrounded by incoherent constructions which highlight its noble regularity.

When one gazes at the Duomo, amidst the square, the first effect is dazzling: the whiteness of the marble, cutting the blue of the sky, strikes you at once; it looks like an immense piece of silver lace set on a background of lapis lazuli. Such is one's first impression of it, and one's final memory. When I think of the Duomo of Milan, that is how it appears to me. The Duomo is one of the rare Gothic churches of Italy, but a form of the Gothic that scarcely resembles ours. Here is not the sombre faith, the unquiet mystery, the shadowy depth, the emaciated outlines, the soaring of earth towards the heavens, the austerity of character which repudiates beauty as overly-sensual, and employs matter only as necessary, so as to step before its God; it is rather a Gothic full of elegance, grace, brilliance, which one might dream of deploying on fairy palaces, and with which one might build alcazars and mosques as well as Catholic temples. The delicacy of its white enormity grants it the air of a glacier with a thousand spires, or a gigantic concretion of stalactites; it is hard to believe that this is a work wrought by human hands.

The design of the facade is simple: a pyramid, like the gable of an ordinary house, but bordered with marble lacework, rests on a wall without projections, of no specific architectural order, pierced by five doors and eight windows, and lined with six groups of tapered columns, or rather ribs, ending in hollowed-out spires surmounted by statues, and filled, in the interstices, with platforms and niches supporting and sheltering the figures of angels, saints and patriarchs. Behind the façade, there spring countless rockets, like the projections of a basalt cave, forests of white marble needles, steeples, pinnacles, minarets, and the central spire, seemingly frozen

and crystallized in the air, lancing towards the azure at a fearful height, and setting the Virgin, who stands at its tip her feet on a gilded base, a mere two paces from the heavens. In the centre of the facade are inscribed the words: *Mariæ nascenti*, the cathedral being dedicated to Mary of the Nativity.



*Milan - The cathedral facade*

Commenced by Gian Galeazzo Visconti, and continued by Ludovico Sforza, Il Moro, the basilica of Milan was completed by Napoleon. It is the largest church in Italy after St. Peter's in Rome: the interior is of a majestic and noble simplicity. Rows of ribbed pillars form five naves. These fused columns, despite their substantial mass, possess a lightness due to the slenderness of the individual barrels. Surmounted on each pillar is a sort of ornate windowed platform whose niches house statues of saints; above, the barrelled ribs continue and join at the top of the vault, decorated with clovers and interlacing Gothic decorations, painted with such perfection that they would deceive the eye completely if it were not that patches left by fallen plaster reveal the bare stone.

At the centre of the main nave, an opening surrounded by a balustrade allows the eye to plunge into the chapel in the crypt where San Carlo Borromeo rests in a coffin of crystal panels bordered with silver. San Carlo Borromeo is the region's most revered saint. His virtues, and

his conduct during the plague of Milan (1629-1631), brought him popularity, and the memory of him is still alive. At the entrance to the choir, on a base which supports a crucifix accompanied by angels in adoration, one reads the following inscription framed in wood: *Attendite ad petram unde excisi estis*: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn (*Isaiah 51*). On each side rise two magnificent pulpits of the same metal, supported by superb bronze figures and plated with silver bas-reliefs whose metal is the least of their value. The organs, placed not far from the pulpits, have large paintings by Camillo Procaccini as shutters, if my memory is not faulty; round the choir reigns a *Way of the Cross*, carved by Gian Andra Biffi and other like Milanese sculptors. The weeping angels, who mark the stations, are posed in various attitudes, and are charming, though their grace seems a little effeminate.

The general impression is one of simplicity and religiosity; the gentle light is conducive to meditation; the lofty pillars rise to the vault in a burst of enthusiasm and faith; no visible detail destroys the majesty of the whole. No over-burdening, no luxurious excess: the lines flow from one end to the other, and the plan of the building can be understood at a single glance. The elegance of the proud exterior here seems veiled in mystery and rendered humbler; the loud marble hymn lowers its voice a little and moderates its outbursts: if the exterior, by dint of its lightness and whiteness, seems pagan perhaps, the interior is Christian without doubt.

The sacristy contains treasures which could not but fail to amaze me, I who have seen the wardrobe of Our Lady of Toledo, a single dress of which, entirely covered in white and black pearls, is worth seven million francs, and which contains no less incredible riches. Firstly, since art is always more important than gold and silver, I noted a beautiful *Christ Fastened to the Column*, by the Milanese sculptor Cristoforo Solari, known as Il Gobbo, and a painting by Daniele Crispi representing a miracle performed by San Carlo Borromeo, a work of quite magisterial force and ferocity of expression; let me next mention the silver busts of archbishops, and of Saint Sebastian, and Saint Thecla patroness of the parish, studded with rubies and topazes; a gold cross studded with sapphires, garnets, burnt topazes, and rock-crystal; a magnificent Gospel dating from 1018, given by Archbishop Aribert, all in gold and bearing on its cover, in the Byzantine style, a petticoated Christ accompanied by four symbolic figures, the lion, the ox, the eagle, and the angel; a ewer for drawing holy water, worked in ivory in the most delicate way and garnished with silver-gilt handles depicting chimeras; a ciborium of Benvenuto Cellini, a prodigy of elegance and finesse; San Carlo Borromeo's mitre with its feather patterns; and paintings on silk by Pellegrino Pellegrini.

In the corner of a nave, before ascending to the roof, we viewed a tomb (*that of Gian Giacomo Medici*) decorated with allegorical figures cast in bronze by the Aretine sculptor Leone Leoni, in a superbly forceful style, after sketches by Michelangelo. One reaches the Duomo's roof by climbing a staircase adorned at every corner with advisory inscriptions or comminatory, which scarcely argue in favour of Italian piety and propriety.

The roof, bristling with pinnacles and flanked by flying buttresses which form corridors when seen in perspective, is formed of large marble slabs, like the rest of the building. It already rises much above the highest monuments of the city. A bas-relief of the finest execution is bedded in each flying buttress; and every pinnacle is populated with twenty-five statues. I doubt that any other place in the world contains as large a number of sculpted figures in the one place.

One might provide a significant town with a marble population, by employing the Duomo statues; there are over two thousand on the roof alone. We have heard of a church in the Morea, painted in the Byzantine style, by the monks of Mount Athos, and which contains no less than three thousand figures, large and small. That is still less than the total possessed by Milan Cathedral. Apropos of painted or sculpted figures, I have often dreamed that if I were ever invested with a magical power, and able to bring to life all the figures created by the many exponents of the arts, in granite or other stone, on wood or canvas, I would fill a whole country with them, whose landscapes would be formed of the backgrounds of existing paintings. The sculpted multitudes of the Duomo reminded me of this fantasy. Among the statues, there is one by Canova, a *Saint Sebastian*, housed in a spire, and an *Eve*, by Cristoforo Solari, of a charming and sensual grace, which is a little surprising in such a location. However, it is very beautiful, and the birds in the heavens do not appear in the least scandalised by her paradisiacal mode of undress.

From the platform one views an immense panorama: one can see, at the same time, both the Alps and the Apennines, and the vast plains of Lombardy, and adjust the bevel of one's watch to set the time from the dial of the church at Monza, of which one can distinguish the black and white facade. At Monza is kept the famous iron crown that Napoleon placed on his head when he was crowned king of Italy, saying: 'God grants me this; beware he who touches it!' The crown is of gold set with precious stones, like all crowns, and owes its name to a small iron band which encircles it within, and which is claimed to be forged of a nail from the true cross, rendering it a both a jewel and a relic. One requires special permission to view it, since it acquired fresh value by touching that august brow; but a wholly accurate copy is on display. The guide informed us of all this at the foot of the bell tower, in French, to which we preferred his Italian. He addressed me, continually, as: 'Monsieur, le chevalier,' because of a piece of red ribbon in my buttonhole, hoping no doubt to soften me to the point of my yielding an Austrian twenty-franc coin, by means of this flattering form of address. It was the first time I had been awarded that honorary title, four hundred steps above the pavement. What an honour!

The ascent of the pierced spire, open to the air, is scarcely dangerous, though it might alarm people prone to vertigo. Frail staircases wind within the turrets, and lead you to a balcony above which there is nothing but the pyramidion of the spire and the statue which crowns the building.

I shall not attempt to describe that gigantic basilica in more detail. A volume would be needed to contain the monograph. Being a poor artist, I must rest content with giving its general appearance, and my personal impressions. When we descended to the street and walked around the cathedral, we discovered the same crowd of statues, the same crowd of bas-reliefs, on the lateral facades and the apse: a frenzied riot of sculptures, a piling-up of incredible wonders.

All about the cathedral are various traders' stalls, including those of second-hand booksellers and open-air opticians, and even a puppet theatre, the performances of which we promised ourselves not to miss. Human life with all its trivialities swarms agitatedly at the foot of that majestic building, that petrified firework display, its host of white rockets bursting in the sky; ever we find the same contrast between the sublimity of the idea, and the crudeness of the reality. The Temple of the Lord grants shade to Punchinello's booth.

Our method, when traveling, is to wander the streets at random, while hoping for fortunate encounters. In the Via degli Omenoni, our lucky star led us to find a façade that would surely charm our friend Auguste Préault: the weight of the entablature bears down on six enormous caryatids in the style of Michelangelo or Pierre Puget, rendered still more flamboyant by an exaggerated air of decadence. Imagine vibrant muscles; knotted, and athletic biceps; a display of Herculean sinews; and you will still not conceive the reality; as for the heads, they are uncultivated, bristling, pagan, their sinister eyes gazing down from beneath bushy eyebrows, while seemingly muttering words of revolt through their various beards: each of these figures bears the name of a defeated barbarian people, personified: Suevus, Quadus, Aeduus, Parthus, Sarmata, and Marcomannus. We commit Romantic sculptors to the traversing of Milan, and to the paying of a visit to this street, and this building, with its old house-number 1722, on the Casa degli Omenoni.

In Milan, almost all the shops display this recommendation on their signs: ‘The ancient house of ... hostelry of .... café of ... At home, we declare: ‘New shop... new café.’ The wine-bars, instead of being plastered with red, as in France, are indicated by vine leaves and grapes to pleasant effect; the watermelon sellers also arrange their displays very attractively. The melons once opened reveal their pink pulp over which a small jet of water, as thin as a hair, is drizzled, or the flesh, released from its rind, is cut into columns each topped with a capital, a piece of ice; nothing seems fresher to the eye than the combination of green rind and reddish slices; their watermelons look nothing like ours; the interior is filled with a kind of snowy marrow, pink in tone, from which springs sweet fresh water. Though pleasant to eat when the weather is hot, watermelon is consumed as much with eyes as with the mouth; the sense of taste is seduced by that of sight. The slices sell for a few *centisimi* each, and regale the masses.

While strolling about, we read the booksellers’ placards, and inspected the titles of the works on display. We were astonished to find the political works of Lamartine, and Louis Blanc, along with the memoirs of Marc Caussidière, Émile de Girardin’s fifty-two little pamphlets, and a host of treaties on matters which we would have thought prohibited from circulation there. We also noted that works on law, political economy, statistics and other similar subjects outnumbered those on literature and poetry proper. Yet we found Dumas everywhere, and, what is stranger, the socialist novels of Eugène Sue, his *Mysteries of Paris* and *The Wandering Jew*. To leave the reader in no doubt as to the tolerance of the police in this regard, a large sign announced, at every corner of the crossroads, an extraordinary performance: *Rodin’s Punishment and Death from Cholera, an Episode from the Wandering Jew*; to be presented at the daytime theatre in the public gardens. A painting, in portrait style, of savage women and boa constrictors showed the wretched Jesuit in convulsions of agony and, by way of attracting an audience, grimacing dreadfully. We could not miss so fine a spectacle, especially since La Scala was closed, and the other theatres offered no performance that day.

## Parts VI to X - Milan and Venice

### Contents

Part VI: Da Vinci's <i>The Last Supper</i> – Brescia – Verona .....	35
Part VII: Venice .....	41
Part VIII: St Mark's Basilica – The Exterior .....	55
Part IX: St Mark's Basilica – The Interior .....	63
Part X: The Doge's Palace .....	74

### Part VI: Da Vinci's *The Last Supper* – Brescia – Verona

The daytime-theatre, which also serves as a circus, since horses and equestrian performances play a large part in its offering, has no ceiling: the vault of the sky takes its place. It consists of a parterre, which literally deserves its name, and open galleries in the form of boxes, but without partitions or rear wall. It was about half-past five and the play indeed began *sub jove, crudo* (*under a bright sky*), but soon dusk fell, then night. A candle was first lit, discreetly, to light the actor on stage, while the rest was plunged into darkness, almost like those performances by dancers from Algiers who, afraid to rely on the lighting of the room where they display their graces, retain an African to stand close by holding a candle, which he raises or lowers illuminating the eyes, waist, or feet, according to the progress of the dance. Then a timid light came to join the first; finally, a piece of planking rose, a few lamps clinging to it, and the daytime theatre was transformed into a poorly-lit night-time theatre. Of course, to act as gas-lights the room had only the stars.

The acting seemed quite good. Unfortunately, the *Adrienne de Cardoville* of *The Wandering Jew* was dour, thin, and dark, and made us regret the blonde and vivacious Alphonsine (*Jeanne Benoit*) of the *Délassements-Comiques* in Paris. The two young girls, though more pleasant, did not sufficiently justify *Dagobert's* surveillance; but *Prince Djalma* was accomplished in every respect; we do not believe it is possible to realise a type more exactly; never did the head of an Indian character roll eyes so full of fire and lightning beneath bluish eyebrows and a white turban; with his thin arched nose, smooth cheeks, crimson mouth, and gold-coloured complexion, one thought of Rama setting out to conquer the island of Sri Lanka. He paced the stage in white clothing enhanced with scarlet decorations like blood-stained netting, with the motion of a young tiger, at the same time both languid and abrupt. *Rodin*, who is the whipping-boy of the play, and whom the public's hatred prefers perhaps to

address by another name, save for the hat with immense brims, possessed the complete physiognomy of Beaumarchais' *Basile* (see *'Le Mariage de Figaro'*), with a nuance of his *Tartuffe* in addition: the black coat, short trousers, stockings and shoes indicated the priest most effectively; the actor, to please the public, had acquired all the ugliness that can be produced with coal, ochre and bistre; he was truly hideous, with a low forehead, dark eyes, livid cheeks and a bluish beard reaching to his cheekbones; the blue-cholera, on leaving the pestilential estuary of the Ganges, grants an appearance no more cadaverous or more dreadful. With each contortion that suffering drew from him, as that terrible illness gripped him, there was applause and a frantic stamping of feet. The foyer, where one can smoke, is in the open air; the actors, who have no dressing room, dress pell-mell behind the scenes, in a kind of wooden hut, as at the Hippodrome in Paris.

That evening, we halted near the cathedral, in front of the puppet-theatre, where the puppets were distributing blows from their sticks, and hanging over the edge of the stage, like the wooden actors of the Guignol theatre on the Champs-Élysées. The dialogue, in Milanese patois, was unintelligible to us, and the comedy was thus reduced to pantomime; the character who seems to fulfil the role of France's Punchinello and England's Mr. Punch, is a sort of Harlequin character who often hunches himself up to defend himself from his opponents' blows.

On our return to the hotel, as we were gazing at an engraving of the *Last Supper*, by Leonardo da Vinci, which we thought completely lost, as reported by various travellers, we were informed that it still existed, and was still quite visible, in the convent, transformed into an Austrian barracks, next to the church of Santa Maria della Grazie.

The next day, our first visit was to that charming church, partially designed by Bramante, and built wholly of brick, which the plaster, fallen in many places, reveals like exposed flesh, and which gives the building, though dilapidated, a pink and white appearance, and a youthful lively air; the side-chapels are decorated with frescoes representing various torments; on the door of one of these chapels are framed two bronze medallions of the Virgin and Christ, done with flowing expressiveness and delicately worked; the low vaults, and the inlays of marble, mirror glass, and faceted crystal that decorate them, are entirely in the Spanish taste, and I saw a very similar effect achieved in the convent of San-Domingo, in Granada.

Leaving the Church through the sacristy, whose blue ceiling is strewn with golden stars, we emerged into the cloister of the old convent. War inhabits that ancient asylum of peace; soldiers, these violent monks, have replaced the previous monks, those peaceful soldiers; monasteries are well suited to use as barracks; military regiments and religious communities, those solitary multitudes, resemble each other in one regard: the absence of family. The pavements of the long arcades, troubled formerly by the monotonous sound of sandals, resonate today beneath the butts of rifles; the drums beat where bells rang; oaths are uttered where prayers were murmured; military life, with its brutality, spreads through the courtyards: here a shirt is drying; there a pair of trousers frolics in the wind; everywhere there are open boxes, racks of weapons, mess bowls and food parcels, the disciplined disorder of camp. Along the walls, scored by time or the carelessness and impious grossness of the soldiery, one can still discern paintings representing the miracles of the founder of the order, always busily thwarting

the temptations of the devil, who sometimes appears to him in the shape of a cat, sometimes disguised as a monkey, or, worse still, in the guise of a beautiful woman.

Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* occupies the north wall of the refectory. The south wall is covered with a Crucifixion by Donato Montorfano, dated 1495. Talent is displayed in that work. But who can compare with Leonardo da Vinci? Certainly, the state of degradation of his masterpiece of human genius is forever regrettable; and yet it does not harm his reputation him as much as one might think. Leonardo is the painter par excellence of the mysterious, the ineffable, the twilit; his painting has the air of music in a minor key. His shadows are veils that he half-closes or deepens, so as to pursue a secret thought. His tones fade like the colours of moonlit objects, his contours are enveloped and drowned as if behind black gauze, and time, which hurts other painters, adds to his works by reinforcing the harmonious darkness in which he liked to immerse himself.



*Leonardo da Vinci's The Last Supper*

The first impression that this marvellous fresco makes is dreamlike, every trace of art has vanished; it seems to float on the surface of the wall, which absorbs it like a slight mist. It is the shadow of a painting, the spectre of a masterpiece that remains. The effect is perhaps more solemn, and speaks to one more religiously, than if the painting were vibrantly alive; the body has vanished, but the spirit survives in its entirety.

Christ occupies the middle seat at the table, with the beloved apostle Saint John on his right; Saint John's attitude is one of swooning adoration, his look attentive and gentle, the mouth half-open, the face still; he leans towards Saint Peter respectfully, but affectionately, his heart heavy for his divine master. Leonardo has drawn the apostles with bold, strongly-accentuated outlines; for the apostles were fishermen, labourers, ordinary men. They indicate, by the energy of their features, by the power of their muscles, that they are the emerging Church. John, with

his feminine figure, his pure features, his complexion fine and delicate in tone, seems rather to belong to the angels than to mankind; he is more aerial than terrestrial, more poetic than dogmatic, more a lover than a mere believer; he symbolizes the passage from humanity to the divine. Christ carries, imprinted on his face the ineffable gentleness of the willing victim, the paradisaical azure behind his head gleams also in his eyes, as words of peace and consolation fall from his lips like heavenly manna in the desert. The tender blue of his eyelids, and the matt surface of his skin, echoes of which seem to have coloured the pallid face of *Charles I*, as painted by Anthony Van Dyck, reveal the sufferings of the Cross borne with a resigned conviction, within. He accepts his fate, resolutely, and does not turn from the sponge of gall at this last meal taken in freedom. One feels the presence of the entirely moral hero, whose power is of the spirit, portrayed in this figure of incomparable sweetness: the carriage of the head, the fineness of the skin, the delicate yet robust limbs, the pure line of the fingers, all denote an aristocratic nature set amidst the rustic and plebeian faces of his companions. Jesus Christ is the son of God; but he is also of the line of the kings of Judah. Did not a wholly spiritual religion require its revelation to be delivered by a tender, elegant and beautiful figure, whom little children could approach without fear? Sit Socrates in Jesus' place, at this supreme moment, and the character of the scene is immediately altered: the former will ask that a cockerel be sacrificed to Aesculapius, the latter will offer himself as the *hostia*, the sacrificial victim; the serenity of Christian art overcoming, here, the beauty of the art of the Greeks.

We could have stayed several more days in Milan, paying visits to the sixteen ancient Columns of San Lorenzo, the great hospital (*the Policlinico*), the Villa Belgiojoso, and several rich or beautiful churches; but we adhered to the principle of not seeking anything further in a given place after an experience arousing profound emotion, and Leonardo's *Last Supper* seemed unsurpassable; and then, Venice had an unconquerable attraction for us.

The railway runs to Treviglio; continuing from there by diligence we traversed Brescia at night, halting there for an hour. Of Brescia I can say nothing, except that the houses, vaguely outlined in the shadows, seemed extremely tall, and that the water of a fountain, in a square, reached by ascending a few steps, brought us the greatest of pleasures by its freshness. Groping about in the darkness, we drank several mouthfuls while the relay horses were harnessed.

In the brightly-lit porch of the inn, a theatre poster was visible. Two ballets were announced for the day of the next fair, the dances from Handel's *Alcina*, and *Giselle* (*whose story Gautier wrote with Jules-Henri Vernoy*), performed by Augusta Maywood, an American dancer, who adorned the stage at the Paris Opéra several years ago. The Brescians were raised in our esteem from that moment, and the superiority of dance and mime, intelligible in every country, was increasingly demonstrated to us.

From Brescia to Verona there was little of note, except for a view of Lake Garda, near Peschiera, since we travelled like Homer's deities, in a cloud; a cloud of dust.

Verona, whose name one cannot pronounce without thinking of *Romeo and Juliet*, where Shakespeare's genius created two characters so real that history would like to accept them as such, presents itself to the traveller's eye in a rather picturesque manner. We followed the Adige for a while, which is spanned by a large and singular bridge of red brick (*Ponte di Castel Vecchio*), with three arches of differing spans, parapets toothed with Moorish crenelations like

the walls of Seville, and steps which inhibit carriages from crossing. Red saw-toothed towers raise their outlines fittingly against the horizon, and a beautiful antique portal, composed of two orders of columns and superimposed porticos, majestically receives the pilgrim.

The Montagues and Capulets could meet and quarrel, now, in the streets of Verona, and Tybalt kill Mercutio there; the scene has not changed: Shakespeare's tragedy is wonderfully accurate. In Verona, as in Spanish towns, there is scarcely a house without a balcony, providing plenty of opportunities for a silken ladder. Few cities have better preserved their Medieval character: the pointed arches, the trefoil windows, open balconies, houses with pillars, sculpted street corners, and large mansions with bronze doorknockers and ornate grilles, their entablatures crowned with statues, glow with architectural details that the artist's pencil alone can render, and transport you to a past century, so that one is astonished to see people in modern dress, and Austrian uhlans (*lancers*) traversing the streets.



*Verona - View of the city from the bell-tower of San Zeno*

This effect is especially noticeable in the crowded Market Square (*Piazza delle Erbe*) bright with watermelons, lemons, citrons, and tomatoes. The houses, painted with frescoes by Paolo Albasini, with their protruding miradors, sculpted ornaments, and robust pillars, display a most

romantic physiognomy; columns with ornate capitals make of the square a motif for watercolourists and painters. It is the liveliest place in the city. Women show their faces everywhere at windows and in doorways, and a swarming crowd moves between the merchants' stalls.

Between the apocryphal Tomb of Juliet, a sort of trough of reddish marble half-buried in a garden, the Scaliger tombs in Via Santa Maria Antica, and the ancient amphitheatre, we chose, being unable to visit everything, the Roman arena, which is better preserved than the Circus at Arles.



*Verona - The Roman arena*

All that is lacking in regards to this arena is the exterior wall; the five or six arches which remain intact would allow a straightforward restoration: a few weeks spent repairing the exterior would allow those bloodthirsty Games to be restarted. While ascending and descending the stone tiers, their edges as perfect as if they had been cut yesterday, we said to ourselves: 'What an admirable place for a bullfight, and what fine blows Paquiro (*Francisco Montes Reina*), Chiclanero (*José Redondo Domínguez*), and Cucharès (*Francisco Arjone Herrera*), would have dealt the Gaviria and Veraguas bulls in this arena which drank the blood of lions

and gladiators!’ We recognised the areas that had housed the gladiators, and the ferocious animals they fought; the entrances and exits for actors, the gangways for the crowd, and the outlets for water after a *naumachia* were perfectly visible; all that was missing was the audience, buried beneath the dust scattered by Jehoshaphat. As if the Veronese wish to contrast our modern mediocrity with ancient grandeur, they have built a stage of wooden planks within the arena, the seating for which barely covers a few rows of the tiered stands; twenty-two thousand people sat, at ease, in the Roman amphitheatre.

While on our way to the railway station which connects Verona to Venice, we heard drum-rolls and noted the movement of troops, and saw a crowd of people all heading in the same direction: we were told that seven brigands were to be executed, and that five had been shot to death the day before. If time had allowed, we would have attended the execution, which in our own country we would have fled from, since when travelling curiosity sometimes extends as far as barbarism, and eyes that seek the new do not always turn away from witnessing punishment, if the executioner is picturesque, and the victim exhibits local colour.

Fortunately, the guard’s whistle made us abandon this cruel thought, and we seated ourselves in the railway carriage, divided from end to end by an aisle, in which two venerable Capuchins had already taken their place, the first monks we had seen. It was six o’clock. We were due to arrive in Venice at eight-thirty.

## **Part VII: Venice**

I feel a degree of shame on behalf of the Italian sky, which, in Paris, we had believed to be of an unalterable blue, in saying that large black clouds blocked the horizon on our departure from Verona; it is sad to begin a journey in the land of the sun with the description of a storm, but truth forces me to confess that the rain fell in vast tranches, first on the distant, then the nearest tracts of terrain, through which the railroad bore us.

Mountains crowned with clouds, hills brightened by castles and country-houses, formed the background to the picture. The foreground consisted of crops, of a very green, varied and picturesque appearance. The vine, in Italy, does not merely stand upright as in France; it is made to climb and hang in garlands from trellises after topping the poles it festoons with its foliage. Nothing is more graceful than the long rows of these vines which, linked by their twining arms, seem to join hands and dance about the fields in an immense farandole; they look like choirs of leafy bacchantes celebrating the ancient festival of Lyaeus, in silent transport: madly coursing from branch to branch, the vines grant the landscape an unimaginable elegance. Near and far, open porticos revealed the farm-workers happily eating their evening meal, and adding to the table’s liveliness.

Let me note here some specifics with regard to the Italian railway system. On the signs marking the distance travelled, there is also an indication of the steepness or elevation of the ground. Signalling is achieved by means of baskets of a particular shape, hoisted on large masts to agreed heights. The track is single with no return rail. At the stations, which are quite

frequent, traders offer little pastries, lemonade, and coffee that you have to swallow while boiling, since one had better not raise the cup to one's mouth when steam rises, the whistle emits its shrill cry, and the convoy starts moving again.

The railway skirts Vicenza, and soon arrives in Padua, of which I can say no more than the sentence which serves as an indication of the setting for Victor Hugo's play *Angelo, the Tyrant of Padua*: 'On the horizon, the silhouette of Medieval Padua.' A bell-tower and a few domes outlined in black against a strip of pale sky, is all we were able to discern; but we will compensate for it later.

The weather failed to mend; gusts of wind, puffs of rain, and sudden flashes of lightning pursued the carriages in their flight; it was almost cold, and the good old peacoat which has rendered me such loyal service in Spain, Africa, England, Holland, and on the banks of the Rhine, granted me the convenient shelter of its vast bulk and long sleeves. Though the locomotive was pulling us along at a brisk pace, it seemed to me, so great was our impatience, that we were travelling on one of those chariots drawn by snails seen in Raphael's Arabesques. Every man, poet or no, chooses one or two cities, as his ideals, which he inhabits in dream, imagining the palaces, streets, houses, views, according to some internal architecture, almost as Piranesi constructed his chimerical buildings with an etching needle, buildings which are nonetheless endowed with a powerful and mysterious reality. What creates the foundations of an inner city? It would be difficult to say. Tales, engravings, the view of some map; sometimes the euphony or singularity of a name; a story read when we were very young; the slightest particular, everything contributes, everything adds to its detail. For my part, three cities have always occupied my thoughts: Granada, Venice and Cairo. I was able to compare the real Granada to my Granada, and set up my camp-bed in the Alhambra: but life is so ill-constructed, time passes so awkwardly, that as yet I knew Venice only as an image traced in the darkened chambers of the brain, where images are often lodged so deeply that the reality scarcely erases them. We were only half an hour away from Venice itself, yet I, who have never wished a single grain of sand to accelerate its fall through the hourglass, so certain am I of death's approach, would have gladly deleted those thirty minutes from my life. As for Cairo, that is another score to settle, and besides Gérard de Nerval has already viewed it on our behalf.

Despite the rain lashing our faces, we leaned out of the carriage-window to try and capture, in the darkness, a distant outline of Venice, the vague silhouette of a bell tower, a gleam of light; but night was deepening, and the shadows impenetrable; finally, at a station, an announcement warned those of us who wished to quit the train at Mestre. It was not long ago that one embarked for Venice there; now the track has rendered the gondola useless: an immense bridge spans the lagoon, and has welded Venice to dry land.

I had never experienced a stranger feeling. The train had just entered the length of track. The sky was like a dome of basalt striped with brownish veins. On both sides, the lagoon, in a moist darkness more sombre than night itself, stretched into the unknown. From time to time, pale lightning-flashes shook their torches over the water, which was revealed by each sudden blaze of fire, and the train seemed to ride the void like a hippogriff in nightmare, since we could distinguish neither sky, nor water, nor bridge. Certainly, it was not how I had dreamed of my entry to Venice; but this method exceeded in fantasy all that John Martin's imagination might

have produced by way of the mysterious, gigantic, and formidable in depicting an avenue in Babylon or Nineveh. The storm and the night had prepared the canvas in shades of darkness on which the lightning drew lines of fire; while the locomotive looked like one of those biblical chariots whose wheels whirled round like flames, delighting some prophet in the seventh heaven.

Our vertiginous course lasted only a few minutes, before the locomotive slowed and stopped. A large landing-stage, without any architectural adornment, receives travellers, who are asked for their passports, while being given a card to allow their later retrieval. Our luggage was piled onto an omnibus, a gondola fitted out like a flat-bottomed barge, and we set off. The Auberge d'Europe, which we had been informed of, was located at precisely the other end of the city, a circumstance that we were not then aware of, and which led to the most astonishing voyage one can imagine: it was not a journey beneath Friedrich Tieck's blue azure, but a journey into the dark, as strange and mysterious as those performed in nightmares, on that demon of the night Smarra's bat-like wings.

To arrive at night, in a city you have dreamed of for many a year, is simply an accident of travel, but one which seems guaranteed to drive the traveller, consumed by curiosity, to the last degree of exasperation. To enter the house of one's chimera blindfolded is the most annoying thing in the world. We had already experienced the same in Granada, where the diligence ejected us at two in the morning in a darkness of desperate opacity.

Our barge first followed a wide canal, at the edge of which shadowy buildings were vaguely outlined, dotted with a few lighted windows and lanterns which poured streaks of glittering light over the black quivering water; then it navigated various narrow canals, aqueous streets which made complicated detours, or at least it seemed so to us because of our ignorance of our course.

The storm, which was sinking to a close, still illuminated the sky with a few livid lightning-bolts revealing profound perspectives, and the strange outlines of unknown palaces. At every moment, we passed beneath bridges whose two ends announced a luminous break in the dark compact mass of houses. At a corner some night-light trembled in front of a Madonna. Singular cries and guttural sounds sounded at every bend of the canal; a floating coffin, over the end of which a shadow leaned, sped past us; a low window, close by, gave us a glimpse of an interior lit by a lamp or some reflection, like a Rembrandt etching. Doors, their sills licked by the swell, opened on emblematic, vanishing figures; flights of stairs came to bathe their steps in the water and seemed to climb the shadows towards mysterious Babels; the colourful posts to which the gondolas are moored took on spectral attitudes.

From the summits of the arches, visages vaguely human, like mournful faces in a dream, watched us pass. Sometimes the lights vanished, and we moved, sinisterly, through four levels of darkness, oily shadows, deep and humid water, the stormy shadows of the night sky, and the opaque darkness of the walls on either side, on one of which the lantern of the boat would cast its reddish reflection revealing pedestals, fluted columns, porticos, and iron-grilles which instantly vanished. All objects touched in the darkness by some stray shaft of light revealed mysterious forms, fantastic, frightening, misproportioned. Water, always so formidable at night, added to the effect with its dull splashing, its seething, restless life.

The rays of the rare street lamps were extended there, in blood-stained trails, and the dense waves, as black as those of Cocytus, seemed to spread their complacent mantle over many a crime. We were surprised not to hear a body fall from the top of some balcony, or from a half-open door; reality has never looked less real than on that evening.

We thought ourselves immersed in some novel by Charles Maturin, 'Monk' Lewis, or Ann Radcliffe, illustrated by Goya, Piranesi, and Rembrandt. The old tales of the Three Inquisitors, the Council of Ten, the Bridge of Sighs, masked spies, the prisons those 'wells' and 'leads', executions at the Orfanello canal, all the melodrama and romantic stage-sets of ancient Venice were recalled to our memories in spite of ourselves, further darkened by reminiscences of Radcliffe's novel *The Confessional of the Black Penitents* ('*The Italian*') and Johann Zschokke's play *Abellino the Great Bandit* ('*Abällino der große Bandit*'). A cold terror, as black and clinging as all around us, now gripped us, and I thought, involuntarily, of Malipiero's tirade to Tisbe (*in the first act of Hugo's 'Angelo, the Tyrant of Padua'*) in which he expresses the fear that Venice inspires in him.

The description of this feeling, which may seem exaggerated, is the most exact truth, and I think it would be difficult, even for the most philistine of positivists, to defend oneself from such an emotion; I would go even further, and say that this is the true essence of Venice, which emerges, at night, from amidst its modern transformations; Venice, a city which appears as if planned by a theatre-designer, and whose manners a playwright seems to have arranged to enhance the interest of intrigues and their denouements.

Darkness restores to her the mystery of which daylight despoils her, hands the ancient masks and dominos to the common inhabitants, and grants the simplest movements of life the appearance of an intrigue or a crime. Every door that gapes, seems to emit a lover or a cavalier. Every gondola, that glides by silently, seems to be bearing away an amorous couple, or a corpse with a broken dagger in its heart.

Finally, the boat came to a stop, at the bottom of a marble staircase, its lower steps bathed by the sea, in front of a facade which shed a blaze of light through all its openings. We had arrived at the old Palazzo Giustinian, transformed today to a hotel, like several other palaces in Venice. Half a dozen gondolas were grouped together at the landing like carriages waiting for their owners: a large staircase, quite monumental in nature, led us to the upper floors, each composed of a room, long and deep, with broad windows, and side apartments, overlooking both the canal and solid ground.

While waiting for supper to be served, we leaned on the balcony, decorated with marble columns and Moorish arches. The rain had ceased. The sky, purified and cleansed, was resplendent with stars; the Milky Way speckled the dark azure with a hundred million white droplets; and the rocket-like flares of numerous meteors crossed the horizon and swiftly faded from sight. Various bright points of light, earthly stars, sparkled on the other bank, which they marked out for us; the indistinct silhouette of a dome was outlined to our right; on the far side of the water, by leaning outwards a little, we discovered to our left a glittering line of fire, which we judged to be the street-lamps of the Piazzetta (*the extension, in the south-east corner, of St Mark's Square, the Piazza San Marco*). A few small sparks, similar to those scattered by

burning paper, swayed in the black depths. They were the lanterns of gondolas going to and fro.

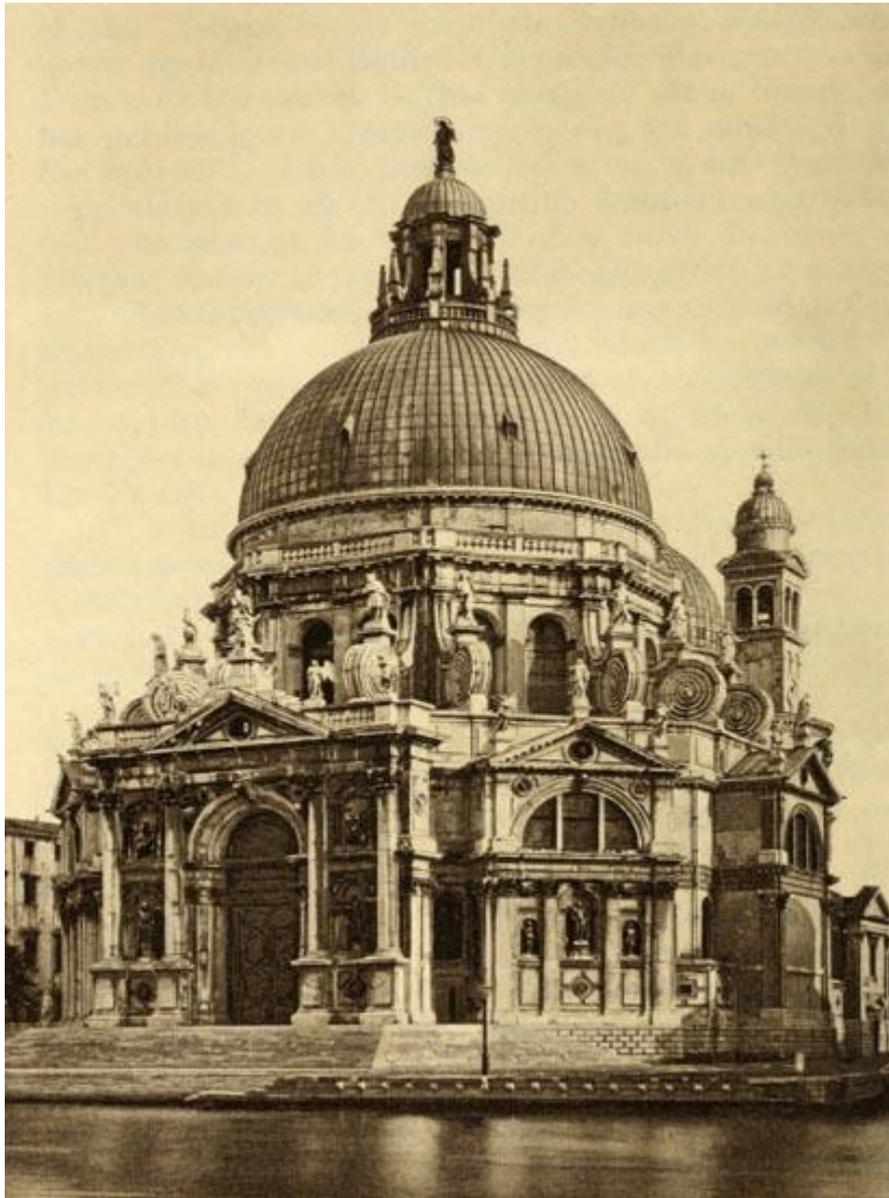
It was not yet late, and we could have taken the air; but we promised ourselves not to mar our first view of St Mark's Square, and decided to wait until next day, when daylight would fill the scene. Hence, we had the strength of will not to leave our room, where we soon fell asleep, despite mosquito attacks, while revisiting in our mind's-eye the Venice of Canaletto, Richard Parkes Bonington, Jules-Romain Joyant, and William Wyld.

In the morning, our first thought was to rush to the balcony: we were at the entrance to the Grand Canal, opposite the maritime customs-house (*Punta della Dogana*), a beautiful building with rustic columns adorned with bosses supporting a square tower, topped with two statues of Atlas kneeling back-to-back and supporting on their sturdy shoulders a terrestrial globe, on which stands a movable figure of naked Fortune, bald-headed behind, hair dishevelled in front, her hands holding the ends of a veil which acts as a weather-vane and yields to the slightest breeze, the statue being hollow like the Giralda in Seville. Near the Dogana, rose the rounded white dome of Santa Maria della Salute, with its convoluted scrolled buttresses, its partly pentagonal steps, and its population of statues.



*Venice - The Schiaconi Quay from the Custom House*

An Eve in the boldest of negligees, smiled at us from the summit of a ledge in a ray of sunlight. We recognized the Salute, immediately, from Canaletto's beautiful painting (*'The Entrance to the Grand Canal, and Sante Maria della Salute'*) which is in the Louvre; behind, we could see the tip of the Giudecca, and the island of San Giorgio Maggiore with, above an Austrian battery, the Palladian church, its Greek facade, oriental dome, and Venetian bell-tower coloured the brightest of pinks.



*Venice - Church of the Salute*

A swimming-school was based at the mouth of the canal, and various boats of different tonnages, and the outlines of fishing-boats, three-masted ships, and a steamboat were visible in the blue serenity of morning. The boats that supply the city are powered by sail or oar,

depending on their place of origin. It was a delightful picture, as bright as that of the evening before had been gloomy.

Walking around Venice is difficult for the stranger. Our first objective therefore was to rent a gondola. The gondola has been much-abused in comic operas, romantic novels, and short stories; giving good reason to render it better known. I will give a detailed description, here. The gondola is a natural product of Venice, an animated being with an individual, local life; a species of fish that cannot survive except in the waters of a canal. The lagoon and the gondola are inseparable, and complement each other. Without the gondola, Venice is unnavigable. The city is a stony coral-reef whose polyps are the gondolas. The gondola alone can meander through the inextricable network, the endless capillaries, of its watery streets.

The gondola, long and narrow, raised at both ends, and drawing very little water, is shaped like a ski. The bow is armed with an iron plate, flat and polished, which vaguely recalls a swan's curved neck, or rather that of a violin with its pegbox, as the six gapped teeth, with which it is sometimes decorated, contribute to the resemblance. The iron plate serves as an ornament, a defence, and a counterweight, the boat bearing a greater weight at the stern; on the side of the gondola, near the bow and stern are inset two pieces of wood, shaped like the yoke of an ox, where the gondolier standing on a little platform leans on his upright oar, his heel supported by a cleat.

The visible parts of the gondola are coated with tar or painted black. A carpet, more or less richly woven, garnishes the interior; in the middle is the cabin, the *felze* which can be easily removed and replaced with a canopy as required, a degenerate innovation which make every true Venetian groan. The *felze* is hung with black cloth throughout, and furnished with two soft Moroccan-style cushioned seats with curved backs in the same colour; in addition, there is a folding seat at each side, so that four people can be accommodated, and a window which one usually leaves open, but which can be shuttered in three ways, firstly by a Venetian mirror, bevelled or framed by flowers engraved in the glass; secondly, by a louvre blind so one can see without being seen; or thirdly, by a panel of fabric over which, to achieve even greater privacy, the *felze's* canopy can be lowered: these different systems slide on a transverse runner. The door through which one enters backwards, since it would be difficult to turn around in the narrow space, is simply a wooden panel with a piece of glass inset. The panel is carved with more or less elegance, depending on the owner's wealth or the gondolier's taste. On the left jamb of this door a copper shield surmounted by a crown gleams, on which a coat of arms or a number is engraved; below it, a small openwork frame faced with glass contains an image to which the owner or gondolier is particularly devoted: of the Blessed Virgin, Saint Mark, Saint Theodore, or Saint George.

This is also where the lantern hangs, the use of which is beginning to fade; many gondolas travel without revealing that star on their brow. Because of the coat of arms, the saint and the lantern, the left is the place of honour; that's where women sit, the elderly, and people of note. At the rear of the cabin, a moving panel allows you to speak to the gondolier stationed at the stern, the only person to actually steer the boat, his oar acting as both oar and rudder. Two silk ropes with grips help you rise when you wish to disembark, since the seating is placed very low down; the canopy of the *felze* is embellished on the outside with silk tassels quite similar

to those of priests' hats, and, when one wants to enclose oneself completely, spreads across the rear of the cabin like an overly-long funeral pall on a coffin. To complete the description, let me add that on the interior planking a species of arabesque is engraved in white on its black wooden field. All this seems less than cheerful, yet, according to Byron's poem *Beppo*, scenes as amusing as those which take place in funeral carriages transpire in these black gondolas. The opera-singer Maria Malibran, who disliked entering the little catafalques, tried, though without success, to have the colour changed. The black livery, which might seem gloomy, does not appear so to the Venetians, accustomed to the colour by the sumptuary edicts of the old republic, whose water-hearses, funeral-biers, and undertaker's clothing are red, by way of contrast.

We chose a gondola with two oarsmen: the one at the stern, scorched and annealed by the sun, with a little Venetian cap on the top of his head, a thick tawny collar of a beard, with sleeves rolled-up, and a belt and wide trousers, recalled the ancient tradition; the other, in the bow, smaller and more modern in appearance, wore a cap from which a curly lock strayed, a striped jacket of Indian cotton, and formal trousers, thereby mingling with the gondolier's air that of a domestic servant. As the weather was fine an awning with blue and white stripes replaced, to our great regret, the felze in which we would have gladly suffocated with heat given our excessive love of local colour.

We asked to be conveyed at once to St Mark's Square, where that row of gaslights had been shining, or so we had assumed, the previous evening. By taking the broad route, we could examine the facade of our lodgings, which was truly magnificent with its three floors of balconies, its Moorish windows and its marble columns. Without the unfortunate sign planted above the portico which contained these words: 'Hôtel d'Europe, Marseille,' the Giustinian palace would have been still as one sees it in that marvellous woodcut by Albrecht Dürer (*'A Bird's Eye View of Venice', in the Correr Museum*) with the exception of two windows on the third floor, located next to the original bay, which can still be discerned in the wall; and the former owners, if they returned from the other world in a gondola steered by Charon, ferryman of the Acheron, would easily find their residence on the Grand Canal intact, though a little dishonoured. Venice is unique in that, though the drama of its existence is over, the adornments of its past remain in place.

Gondoliers row while standing, leaning on their oar. It is most surprising that they succeed at every moment in not falling overboard, since the whole weight of their body is tilted forwards. It is only long experience at the task that grants them the necessary poise to remain always suspended thus. Their apprenticeship must involve more than one ducking; their skill in avoiding collisions is unequalled, as is the precision with which they navigate a street corner, or approach a *traghetto* (ferry), or a staircase; the gondola is so responsive to the slightest touch, that it seems like a living being.

A few strokes soon brought us to one of the most marvellous spectacles the human eye has ever contemplated: the Piazzetta seen from the sea! Standing at the bow of the stationary gondola, we gazed for some time, in mute ecstasy, at a scene unrivalled in all the world, and the only one perhaps that the imagination cannot outdo.

To our left, viewed from the water, we saw the trees of the royal garden, tracing a verdant line beyond the white terrace, then the *Zecca* (*the Mint*), a building of robust architecture, and the old library (*Biblioteca Marciana*), the work of Jacopo Sansovino, with its elegant arcades, crowned with mythological statues.

To our right, separated by a space occupied by the Piazzetta, the vestibule of St Mark's Square, the Doge's palace offered its vermilion diamond-patterned facade of white and pink marble, its massive pillars supporting a columned gallery whose ribs contain quatrefoils, its six, pointed windows, its monumental balcony embellished with platforms, niches, pinnacles, and statuettes, dominated by the Goddess of Justice; its parapet piercing the blue of the sky with alternating acanthus leaves and stone spikes, and the spiral columns which clad its corners, topped by an open-work turret.



*Venice - St Mark's, Piazzetta*

At the rear of the Piazzetta, on the side containing the Library, the Campanile rises to a prodigious height, an immense brick tower with a pointed roof surmounted by a gilded angel. On the side containing the Doge's Palace, St Mark's Basilica, seen from its flank, reveals a corner of its portal, which faces the Piazza. The Perspective ends in the arcades of the

Procuratie Vecchie (*the Old Procuracies*), and the Clock Tower, with its bronze Jacquemartes (*a pair of bell-strikers*), its Lion of Saint Mark against a starred blue background, and its large azure dial, marking the twenty-four hours of each day.

In the foreground, opposite the gondola landing-stage, between the Library and the Doge's Palace, stand two huge columns of African granite in one piece, once rose-red but now bleached to cooler tones by the wind and rain.

On the left, again looking from the sea, atop a column, stands a statue of Saint Theodore, handsome in appearance, in a triumphant attitude, his forehead topped with a metal nimbus, his sword at his side, a spear gripped in his fist, hand resting on his shield, treading a crocodile underfoot.

On the right, atop a second column, the lion of Saint Mark in bronze, wings outspread, claw on the Gospel, the muzzle frowning, turns his back on Saint Theodore's crocodile, with the fiercest and most sullen air that a merely heraldic animal can adopt. The two monsters seem not to want to associate with one another.

They say it is an ill omen to disembark between these two columns, where executions were once carried out, and we begged the gondolier, when putting us ashore, to moor alongside the steps in front of the Zecca or at the Ponte della Paglia bridge, not caring to end up like Doge Marino Faliero, who was upset at having been hurled by the storm at the foot of those formidable pillars.

Beyond the Doge's palace, to the right, one sees the Prigioni Nuove (*the New Prison*), to which it is connected by the Bridge of Sighs, a kind of cenotaph suspended above the Rio de Palazzo north of the Ponte della Paglia; then a curving line of palaces, houses, churches, buildings of all kinds, which forms the Slavonic Quay (*the Riva degli Schiavoni*), and ends in the verdant massif of the public gardens, the tip of which juts out into the sea.

Near the Zecca, opposite the Punta della Dogana, the entrance to the Grand Canal forms the near end of the panoramic arc of Venice which stretches from the public gardens to that point, and which presents the city like a sea-born Venus, the salty pearls of her natal element now drying on shore.

I have indicated, as precisely as I can, the main lineaments of the picture; but what is lacking is the effect, the colour, the movement, the frisson of the air and the water that is life. How to express those pink tones of the Doge's Palace, that seem those of living flesh; the snowy whiteness of the statues, their flowing lines revealed beneath the azure skies of Veronese and Titian; the redness of the Campanile, which the sun caresses; the flashes of distant gold, the thousand aspects of the sea, sometimes clear as a mirror, sometimes glittering with sequins like the skirt of a dancer? Who can portray the vaguely luminous atmosphere, full of rays of light and mist from which the sun fails to exclude the clouds; the to-ing and fro-ing of gondolas, barques, argosies, galiots; the sails gleaming red or white; the ships resting their figureheads familiarly on the quay, with their thousand picturesque features, their flags, their ropes and netting drying in the sun; the sailors loading and unloading the boats, the boxes they carry, the barrels they roll along, the motley pedestrians on the mole, Dalmatians, Greeks, Levantines, and the rest, whom Canaletto would have indicated with a single brushstroke? How to show

all of this simultaneously, as in nature, in unfolding procession? For the poet, less fortunate than the painter or the musician, must progress line by line, while the former has a whole palette, the latter a whole orchestra?

The Piazzetta landing-stage is adorned with Gothic lanterns, and decorated with the figures of saints, planted on poles rising from the water. One of these lanterns was donated by the Duchess de Berry. Gondolas riot about in this area, the busiest of all. To approach the shore, the axe-like prow of the boat is employed as a wedge, with the help of which the mass of boats can be parted. As one approaches, a crowd of rascals, old and young, dressed in rags, came running, each holding in one hand a stick armed with a nail, which hooks the boat like a gaff, and holds it while one sets foot on the ground, an operation which at first presents a degree of difficulty, given the extreme mobility of the frail boat. You become aware that their concern is not simply to prevent you from falling into the water, or bathing your feet on the lower step, since a dusty hand or a greasy hat, humbly extended, invites you to drop therein a sou or an Austrian kreuzter, their reward for this small service.

On the bases of the two columns, sit the gondoliers waiting for a fare, the beggars, the skinny half-naked children looking to make a living on the stairways of Venice, a whole picaresque population, lover of *far niente* (*idleness*) and the sun. The column-bases were once decorated with sculptures now almost erased by friction, which seem to have represented figurines holding fruits and foliage. How many trouser-bottoms it must have taken to wear down the granite is a problem I leave to mathematicians with little to solve. To complete my comments regarding the columns, let me say that Saint Theodore's leans a little in the library's direction, while that supporting the lion of Saint Mark leans towards the Doge's Palace.

The first steps we took towards the Piazzetta brought us to an Austrian gatehouse striped in yellow and black, alongside four cannons with yellow-painted mountings, their muzzles stoppered with tampions, their ammunition caissons behind, forming a kind of artillery park abutting on the pointed arcades of the Doge's Palace. Political ideas aside, the scene shocks one like a dissonance in a symphony otherwise admirable in nature; it is a crudity that sits heavily with the poetry of the view.

The facade of the Doge's Palace overlooking the Piazzetta, is like a face gazing at the sea; the one and the other form that monumental intersection where Daniele Manin, resigning the provisional government after the capitulation of Venice in 1849, harangued the populace for the last time.

At the end of the Piazzetta is the Piazza, which is at right-angles to it, and which, as its name indicates, is much larger.

The four sides of the Piazza are occupied by the façade of the Basilica of San Marco, north of the Doge's Palace, the Clock Tower, the Old and New Procuracies, which blend with it, and an ugly modern palazzo in classical style, foolishly built, in 1809, to make a throne-room (*the Napoleonic wing of the Procuracies*), in place of the delightful church of San Geminiano, whose elegant style had corresponded so well to that of the Basilica. The Campanile, adorned at its base with a charming small building designed by Jacopo Sansovino, called the Loggetta,

is isolated and stands at the corner of the New Procuracy; approximately in line with it, are planted the three masts which supported the standards of the republic.

By walking towards the rear of the square, one enjoys a truly magical scene that proves dazzling, however prepared for the sight one is by art-works, and description. San Marco is before you with its five domes, its porches gleaming with gold-ground mosaics, its openwork bell-towers, its immense arched glass window, in front of which the four horses of Lysippus paw their stone plinths, its columned galleries, its winged lion, its pointed flowery gables whose foliage bears statues, its pillars of porphyry and antique marble, its appearance of being at the same time temple, basilica and mosque: a strange and mysterious building, exquisite and barbaric, an immense pile of riches, a church built by pirates, formed of fragments stolen or won from every known civilisation.

The bright light made the great Evangelist shine, against his heavens starred with gold; the sparkling mosaics glittered; the domes, rounded like the domes of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, were a silvery grey, and clouds of doves flew from time to time about the cornices and balustrades, landing familiarly on the square. It seemed like an oriental dream, petrified by the power of some enchanter, a Moorish church, or a Mosque raised by a caliph converted to Christianity. During our walk I failed to take in all the detail, and the impression I will convey is therefore incomplete; rather it is a general one, coloured in the lively tones that one sees at first glance. We will now, if you wish, ascend the Campanile. Such is my habit when I arrive in a city: I prefer a relief map to all the plans and guides in the world. Thus, I immediately head for the highest point of each place in which I choose to stay.

Like the Giralda in Seville, the Campanile has no stairs: one ascends via a ramp that could be climbed on horseback, as the slope is quite gentle. The interior of the Campanile is filled by a brick cage around which the ramp turns, and which is windowed by large elongated openings. At each pillar a small loophole pierced in on one of the faces of the tower allows sufficient light. After climbing for a long while, one reaches the platform, where the bells hang. Columns of green and red marble support four arcades on each side below the Campanile's summit, providing a view towards the four points of the horizon; a spiral staircase allows you to climb even higher, to the foot of the gilded angel, but it is an unnecessary task, since a complete panorama of Venice is visible from the lower level.

If, while leaning on the balustrade, face turned away from the sea, one looks down, one sees firstly the roof, populated by Venus, Neptune, Mars, and other allegorical figures, of Sansovino's Library, today a royal palace, then that of the Doge's Palace, covered with lead, the eye plunging also into the courtyard of the Zecca, while the Piazzetta, with its columns and gondolas, displays its patterned paving. Further off is the sea, with its scattered islands and boats.

San Giorgio Maggiore with its red bell tower, its two white bastions, its basin, and its line of vessels attracted by the free port, appears in the foreground. A canal separates it from the Giudecca, a maritime suburb of Venice which presents a line of houses towards the city, a belt of gardens towards the sea. The Giudecca has two main churches, Santa Maria della Presentazione (*the Zitelle*) and the Redentore (*Chiesa del Santissimo Redontere*), whose white dome houses a Capuchin convent.

Beyond San Giorgio to the south-east, we discover the Sanita a tiny islet; San Servolo, where the asylum for the insane is located; San Lazzaro, with its Armenian monastery and college of oriental languages; and finally, the Lido, an arid and sandy beach, which, with the long, low, narrow tongue of land of Malamocco, provides Venice with a rampart against the tides of the Adriatic.

Beyond the Giudecca to the south, sinking less into the horizon, are La Grazia; San Clemente, a place of penance and detention for disciplined priests; Poveglia, off which vessels are quarantined; and, following the line of Malamocco, and almost invisible amidst the glitter of the waves, the village of San Pietro in Volta (*on the island of Pellestrina*). The islands are often marked by one of those tall red Venetian bell-towers of which the Campanile seems to be the prototype.

Over the water move a vast crowd of ships, gondolas, every manner of vessel: while we were on top of the bell-tower, the steam-boat from Trieste arrived spewing vapour, its paddles turning, and making great swirls in the tranquil sea of which, in places, we could see the bed; lines of piles mark routes through the lagoon passable by ships, for the depth is ordinarily only three or four feet; these stakes seen from above look like men fishing in water up to their thighs.

Further off, the eyes are lost among large azure circles that you might take for sky, if some sail gilded by a ray of sunshine did not warn you of your mistake.

The transparency of the air, the limpidity of the waters, the radiance of the light, the sharpness of the silhouettes, the depth and subtlety of tone, gave this immense view a dazzling, dizzying splendour.

Looking to the west of the Piazza, from south to north, the perspective presents itself thus: the line of the Giudecca; the Dogana with its statue of a dishevelled Fortune, whose globe, which is in process of being re-gilded, shines with a brand new gleam; Santa Maria de la Salute with its double dome; the entrance to the Grand Canal which, despite its width, soon vanishes between the houses; San Moisè and its bell tower, joined to the church by a bridge; Santo Stephano, its brick tower topped by a cross; the large reddish church of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, raising its angular facade above the roofs; the blackish-green dome of San Simeone Piccolo, the only dome in Venice of that colour, being covered in copper and not lead, which produces, amidst the silver casques of the other churches, the effect of the armour of the 'unknown knight' in some Medieval tournament; and then, at the end of the still invisible canal, San Geremia, whose dome and tower were shelled during the siege (*of 1849*). Beside San Geremia, the trees of the Botanical Gardens show their verdure, and the Chiesa degli Scalzi, next to the railway station, reveals its facade under repair, encumbered with scaffolding.

Between all these churches, which overtop the inferior buildings by the height of their conception, lies a tumultuous ocean of disordered roofs and tiles, of thousands of circular, square, and flared chimneys, crenelated and turreted, and blossoming like flower pots, of the weirdest and most unexpected shapes; ignore some pediment, some corner of a palace emerging from the hustle and bustle of the houses, and you have the foreground, bathed in a clear, warm, golden light, contrasting admirably with the vague blue of the sea beyond the

roofs to the south-west, dotted only by two islands, Sant'Angelo delle Polvere and San Giorgio in Alga.

On the far horizon to the west, the Euganean hills, southerly offshoots of the Dolomites, undulate in azure lines. At the foot of the hills, wide green stripes indicate the fertile fields of the mainland, and Padua is silhouetted there, blurred by distance; an ashen beach, which the tide leaves uncovered, since there is an ebb and flow in the Adriatic though barely any in the Mediterranean, serves as a transition and half-tone between land and water. The railway-bridge, easily visible from this height, crosses the lagoon, connects Venice to the continent, and makes a peninsula of an island. Fusina and Mestre are on the far side, the former to the left of the railway, the latter to the right.

The third window of the Campanile, facing the Clock-Tower to the north, frames the Chiesa della Madonna dell'Orto, whose tall, red, domed bell-tower, and large tiled roof, stands out clearly; the Holy Apostles (*Chiesa dei Santi Apostoli di Cristo*), with its white turret, adorned with a dial, and a cross above a globe; and the Jesuits (*Chiesa di Santa Maria Assunta detta I Gesuiti*), its statues contorted and out-thrust from the pediment dancing against the blue of the sea; plus, the obligatory accompaniment of chimneys and roofs.

What is singular is that nowhere do we catch sight of the Grand Canal; there is not even a suspicion of its stretches of water that should appear like streets among the islands of houses; everything forms a compact block, a frozen tempest of tiles and attics, amidst which the churches float like ships at anchor.

By leaning a little to the east, one's eye encounters the bell-tower and grey dome of the Basilica dei Santi Giovanni et Paulo, a vast brick building: then the elegant tower of Santa Maria Formosa, whose whiteness contrasts with the pinkish tones of the whole; further west in the sea lies the island fortress of San Secondo. Offshore, the cemetery-isle of San Michele, surrounded by pink walls, and flanked by two churches, San Cristoforo and San Michele, offers up its little green rectangle dotted with black crosses. In the same direction, in the middle of the lagoon, is Murano, where the Venetian glassware was made which still adorns dressers, the reddish bell-tower of its Church of the Angels (*Santa Maria degli Angeli*) attracting the eye, along with the roof of San Pietro Martire, and three tall cypresses, which rise like a trio of dark spires from a cluster of houses and trees.

From the fourth window of the Campanile, beyond the Doge's Palace, we discover, to the east, San Francesco della Vigne and its bell tower, remarkable for its pinkish panels edged with white; San Zaccaria, whose greyish dome surmounted by a globe with a cross like St Mark's column, and tall facade composed of three curved pediments, emerges from among the houses; the Arsenal, with its square towers, pink above, white below, its docks of shimmering water, its large hangars arched like aqueducts, its pulleys, machinery, and general appearance of a magazine and rope-making factory; and further off the dome and bell-tower of the Basilica di San Pietro di Castello, and the triangular pediment and spire of Sant'Elena.

Offshore, looking towards the open water to the north-east, the islands of Burano, Mazzorbo and Torcello, where the first Venetians lived, can be seen; the distance presents only

flat isles lush with cultivation, a few scattered houses, and three churches, one more visible than the others.

Otherwise, all is sky and water, festooned with foam, a passing sail, a gull flapping its wings amidst blue and luminous vapour; a bright immensity, the greatest of immensities!

In the surround to this window carved in letters characteristic of the calligraphy of his day, can be read this inscription, engraved with a knife: Adrian Ziegler, 1604. Was this some ancestor of the modern painter of that name; one who left, in the surface of the Campanile, this trace of his visit to Venice?

Knowing its general configuration, we can now descend to the city, traverse it in every direction, and examine every detail; Italy, as everyone knows, has the shape of a riding-boot; Venice has the appearance of a thigh-boot. The upper part is formed by the districts of Dorsoduro and Santa Croce, the leg by St. Mark's, Cannaregio, and Castello, the toe by the public gardens, the heel by the islands of San Pietro, and the under-strap by the Castello bridge. The Grand Canal, winding across the top of the boot, would represent the stitching on the flap.

## **Part VIII: St Mark's Basilica – The Exterior**

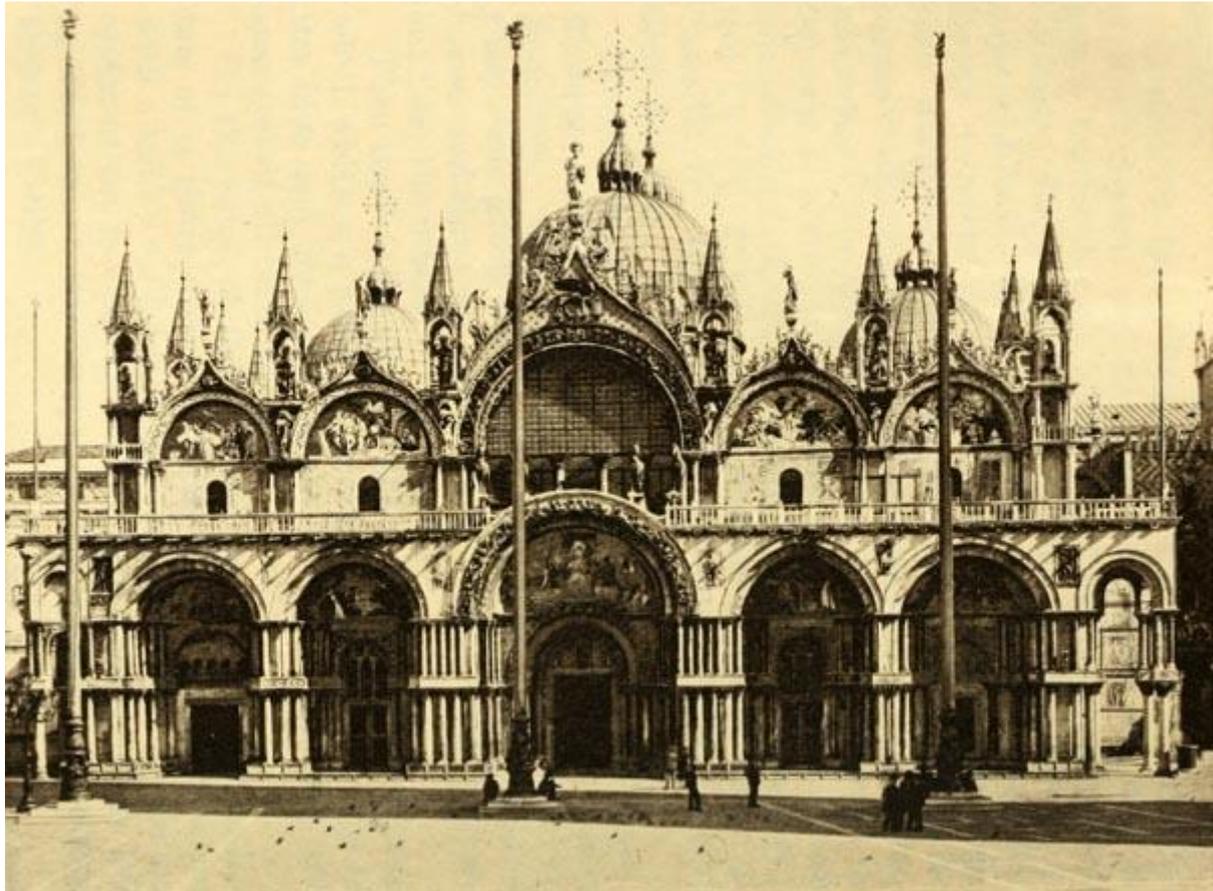


*Venice - Saint Mark's Square*

In describing the Piazza, I have given the general appearance general of Saint-Mark's, as can be grasped at first sight; but Saint-Mark's is a world of itself about which one could write volumes, and still return to create more.

Like the mosque of Cordoba, with which it shares more than one point of resemblance, the Basilica di San Marco, possesses more breadth than height, contrary to the habit of Gothic churches to rush towards the heavens defended by ogives, pinnacles, and spires. The large central dome is only one hundred and forty feet high. St Mark's has retained the character of primitive Christianity, when, barely out of the catacombs and not yet having formulated a style of its own, it sought to build a church based on the remains of ancient temples, and the designs of pagan art. Begun in 979, under Doge Pietro I Orseolo, the present Basilica of Saint Mark was gradually completed, enriched, in each century, with some new treasure, some new beauty, yet this singular building, which eschews any notion of proportion, this collection of columns, capitals, bas-reliefs, enamels, and mosaics, this mixture of Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Arabic, and Gothic styles, exhibits an almost harmonious whole.

This incoherent temple, where the pagan might find his altar to Neptune, with its dolphins, tridents, and conch-shell serving as a font; where the Muslim might believe it a mosque, on seeing the inscriptions on the walls and the vaulted dome, much like suras of the Koran; where the Greek Christian might find his Panagia crowned as Empress of Constantinople, his barbarous Christ with an interlaced monogram, and the special saints of his calendar, done in the style of Manuel Panselinos and the artist-monks of the holy mountain (*Mount Athos*); where the Catholic feels, in these shadowy naves, illuminated by the tawny reflection of the golden mosaics, the living heartbeat of the absolute faith of the earliest days, of the submission to dogma and hieratic forms, of the mysterious and profound Christianity of the ages of belief; this temple, I say, made of bits and pieces that contradict each other, enchants and caresses the eye more truly than the most correct, most symmetrical architecture could achieve: unity is born from multiplicity. Full arches, ogives, trefoils, columns, fleurons, domes, marble slabs, the gilded backgrounds and bright colours of the mosaics, all this is arranged with a rare fortuity, and forms the most magnificent of monumental bouquets.



*Venice - Saint Mark's, facade*

The facade facing the square has five porches giving onto the church, and two leading to the exterior lateral galleries; in all, seven openings, three on each side of the large central porch. The main door is marked by a group of columns at each side, four of porphyry, and one of 'antique green' serpentine, and two groups of three serpentine columns above supporting the curve of the semicircular arch. The other porches possess only two columns on each level. I am speaking here only of the facade itself, since the areas between the porches are adorned with other columns in Cipollino marble, jasper, Pentelic marble, and other rare materials.

Let me examine the mosaics and the ornamentation of this marvellous portal in some detail. Starting with the first main arch on the seaward side, one notices, above a square a door closed by a grille, a black and gold Byzantine feature in the shape of a reliquary, with two angels attached to the ribs of the ogive. Above this, the tympanum of the semicircular arch, presents a large mosaic on a gold background, representing the body of Saint Mark removed from the crypts of Alexandria and smuggled through the Turkish guards between two sides of bacon, the pig being an animal Muslims consider filthy and are horrified by, and contact with which would drive them to endless purification and ablution. The infidels move away with gestures of disgust, and unwittingly allow the body of the apostolic saint to be borne away. This mosaic was executed according to the design created by Pietro della Vecchia, in about 1640. In the gap (*spandrel*) between the arches, on the right, is embedded an ancient bas-relief of Heracles

carrying the Ceryneian Hind on his shoulders and treading the Lernaean Hydra underfoot, while on the left (from the spectator's point of view), by one of these contrasts so frequent in St Mark's, we see the angel Gabriel standing, winged, haloed and booted, leaning on his spear; a singular counterpart to the son of Zeus and Alcmena!

In the next arch to the left a wider door was cut, surmounted by a triple-arched window, at the top of which are two quatrefoils surrounded by a border of enamel. The mosaic of the tympanum, also on a gold background, like all those of Saint Mark, has as its subject the arrival of the body of the Apostle at Venice, where it was received, upon being disembarked from the ship, by the clergy and principals of the city; we see the vessel which transported it and the wicker baskets that contained it: this mosaic was also designed by Pietro della Vecchia.

A Saint Demetrius, seated, half-drawing the sword from the sheath, his name engraved near his head, his face being of a very fierce late-empire appearance, continues the line of bas-reliefs embedded in the facade of the basilica as on a museum wall.

We now arrive at the central door, the large porch, whose arch cuts into the marble balustrade that sits above the other doors; it is, as it should be, richer and more ornate; besides the mass of columns in antique marble which support it and grant it importance, minor arches, two interior and the other exterior, strongly outline the arch with their curvature. These three arcs with sculpted ornamentation, pierced and cut with wonderful patience, consist of a bushy spiral of branches, foliage, flowers, fruits, birds, angels, saints, figurines and chimeras of all kinds; in the widest, the arabesques spring from the hands of two statues seated at each end of the arc.

The door is furnished with leaves of bronze, and studded with the faces of fantastic animals, its crowning glory being a niche above, with two gilded, trellised, and perforated shutters, in the form of a triptych or cabinet.

A *Last Judgment*, of large dimensions, occupies the top of the arch. The composition, said to be by Antonio Zanchi, and its execution in mosaic by Giovanni di Pietro 'Lo Spagna' dating from around 1680, was restored in 1838 (by *Liborio Salandri and Lattanzio Querena*) in accord with the old design. The delineation of Christ, which is somewhat reminiscent of that by Michelangelo in the Sistine, separates the virtuous and the sinners. He has near him his divine mother and his beloved disciple Saint John, who appear to intercede for the sinners, and leans against his cross which supports a respectfully-concerned angel. Other angels sound their trumpets with full cheeks, to wake the stubborn sleepers from their graves.

Above this porch, on the gallery which surrounds the main facade of the church, are placed the famous horses, which under Napoleon adorned the triumphal arch of the Carrousel, posed on antique pillars as their bases. Opinion is divided with regard to them: some claim them to be Roman works from the time of Nero, transported to Constantinople in the fourth century; others, claim them to be Greek works from the island of Chios, brought, by order of Theodosius in the fifth century, to that same city, where they adorned the racecourse (*the Hippodrome*); and yet others affirm that the horses are from the hand of Lysippus. What is certain is that they are ancient, and that, in the year 1205, Marino Zeno, who was the *podesta* in Constantinople for the Venetians, had them removed from the Hippodrome and brought to Venice. These

horses, of life size, somewhat short in the neck, with manes cut short like that of the horses of the Parthenon, can be classified among the most beautiful relics of antiquity. They are truly historic and of rare quality; their stance indicates that they were harnessed to some triumphal quadriga. Their material is no less valuable than their form; they are said to be made of Corinthian bronze, whose greenish patina can be seen through a gilding of varnish faded by time.

The fourth porch offers in its lower part a similar design to the second. The summit of the arch is occupied by a mosaic representing the Doge, senators, and patricians of Venice gathering to honour the body of Saint Mark which is lying on a shrine and covered with a drape in brilliant blue; in the corner cluster a group of Turks, confused at having allowed such a treasure to be stolen. This mosaic, one of the most dazzling in tone, was executed in 1728, by Leopoldo del Pozzo, based on a drawing by Sebastiano Ricci. It is very beautiful. The senator in the Purple Robe has a wholly Titianesque air. In the spandrel between it and the large portal, we see a Saint George in Graeco-Byzantine style; on the other side an angel or an unknown saint.

The fifth porch is the most curious. Five small windows, with gilded trellises of varied design, fill the lower portion. Above, the four evangelical creatures in gilded bronze, the ox, the lion, the eagle, and the angel, as fantastic in form as Japanese chimeras, cast suspicious glances at each other, while over them a strange rider, on a mount that might be Pegasus or the pale horse of the Apocalypse, paws the ground between two gold rosettes. The capitals of the columns are also executed with a wilder, more archaic, more ornate taste than elsewhere.

Above the arch, a mosaic, the work of an unknown artist of the twelfth century, contains a painting of great interest, a view of the basilica, built to receive the relics of Saint Mark, as it was eight hundred years ago. The domes, of which the design only allows us to see three, and the porches of the facade have approximately the same form as today; the horses, recently arrived from Constantinople, are already in place; the main arch is occupied by a large Byzantine Christ with his Greek monogram, the others are filled with rosettes, fleurons and arabesques. The body of the saint, carried on the shoulders of prelates and bishops, enters, in profile, the church dedicated to him. A host of characters, groups of women clad, as one imagines the Greek empresses were, in long dresses studded with embroidery, rush to see the ceremony.

The line of disparate bas-reliefs, whose subjects I have identified, ends on this side with Heracles in command of the Erymanthian Boar which seems to threaten a small being, grotesquely posed, waist-deep in a barrel. Beneath this bas-relief are two lions rampant, and, a little lower down, an ancient figure, carved in the round, holds an amphora on his shoulder. This theme, undoubtedly arising by chance, was happily repeated in the rest of the building.

This row of porches which forms the first register of the facade is topped by a white marble balustrade; the second contains five arches, the middle one, much larger than the others, curving behind the horses of Lysippus, is glazed instead of carrying a mosaic, and is decorated with four ancient pillars.

Six turrets (*aediculae or tabernacles*), each composed of four columns forming an openwork niche which contains a statue of an evangelist, beneath a pinnacle encircled by a gilded crown and topped with a weather vane, separate these arches whose tympani are semi-circular, and whose ribs taper to an ogival point. The four subjects of the mosaics they contain represent the Ascension; the Resurrection; Jesus raising Adam, Eve, and the patriarchs from Limbo; and the Descent from the Cross; the mosaics having been created by Luigi Gaetano, according to the designs of Maffeo Verona, in 1617. In the spandrels are placed the naked figures of slaves, life-size and carrying, on their shoulders, urns and amphoras tilted as if they wished to pour the water taken from a fount into a basin; their hollow vessels are aimed towards the gutters, and thus the slaves play the role of gargoyles. They possess a wide variety of poses, and are superbly done.

At the ogival point of the large middle window, on a dark blue background strewn with stars, stands the lion of Saint Mark, gilded, haloed, wings outstretched, claws on an open Bible on which these words are inscribed: *Pax tibi, Marce, evangelista meus (Peace be with you, Mark, my Evangelist)*. It looks both apocalyptic and awe-inspiring, gazing towards at the sea like a watchful dragon; above this symbolic representation of the Evangelist, Saint Mark, this time in human form, stands at the tip of the gable, seeming to receive the neighbouring statues' homage. The five arches are festooned along their pointed ribs with large scrolls, foliage, and richly-carved acanthus florets whose efflorescence is an angel or holy figure in an attitude of adoration. On each of the minor gables rises a statue, Saint John, Saint George, Saint Theodore, and Saint Michael, wearing haloes in the shape of hats.

At each end of the balustrade, there are two masts painted red to which are attached banners on Sundays and feast days; at the corner of the guardrail, on the side of the Campanile, is planted a severed head, of blood-red porphyry.

The lateral facade, which overlooks the Piazzetta and abuts on the Doge's Palace, deserves to be examined. If, despite all my care and desired accuracy, my description seems a little confusing, please do not blame me too greatly: it is difficult to describe in orderly fashion a hybrid building, as composite and disparate as Saint Mark's. From the *Porta della Carta* created by Bartolomeo Bon, which leads to the Giants staircase in the courtyard of the Doge's Palace, the basilica reveals a flank decorated with marble slabs and Classical, Byzantine, and Medieval bas-reliefs, birds, chimeras, interlaced carvings, and creatures of all kinds: lions, ferocious beasts chasing hares; and children, half-swallowed up by dragons that resemble the Milanese *biscioni*, and holding in their hands a cartouche whose inscription is almost erased.

One of the curiosities of this angle of the building are two porphyry figures, repeated again in exactly the same pose (*now known now as the Four Tetrarchs*). They represent warriors, wearing approximately the same costume as the crusaders on entering Constantinople, and sculpted in a completely primitive and barbaric way, like naive Gothic bas-reliefs only more so. These men, carved in porphyry, with their hands on the hilts of their swords, seem to be consulting about the enactment of some violent plan: I imagined them to be Harmodius and Aristogeiton preparing to strike the tyrant Hipparchus (*in 512BC*). This is the accepted opinion. The learned scholar Andreas Moustoxydis recognises in them the four Anemuria brothers, who conspired against Alexius Comnenus, Emperor of the East. They might well simply be the four

sons of Aymon (*see the anonymous Medieval tale*). I am leaning towards this opinion. According to others, these four porphyry figures represent two pairs of Saracen thieves who, having conceived the project of stealing the treasures of Saint Mark's, mutually poisoned each other, while aiming to seize the larger part.

It is on this side that two large pillars are planted, taken from the church of Saint Sabas, in St Jean d'Acre (*the city of Acre*), and covered with bizarre ornamentation, and inscriptions in rather crude Kufic characters the secret of which is not well understood. A little further, at the corner of the basilica, there is a large block of porphyry in the shape of a column section, with a base and a capital of white marble; a sort of pillory on which bankrupts were once exposed. This usage has fallen into disuse; but it is rare, however, for anyone to sit there, and the Venetians, so quick to settle on the first pedestal or staircase they come to, seem to avoid it.

A bronze door leading to the baptistery chapel occupies the lower part of the first arch; it has for transom a window with columns, with a pointed arch and quatrefoils; two brightly coloured enamel shields, one of which is charged with a cross, and a rosette pierced in fish-slice fashion, completing the decoration of this tympanum. A mosaic of Saint Vitus, and one of an Evangelist holding a pen and book, are painted within niches carved at the two lower points of the arch. A small pediment in the style of the Renaissance, and white marble slabs, engraved with a green cross, fill the void of the second porch. A red, embossed bench from Verona offers, at the base of this pure type of facade, a convenient seat for a lazy person or a dreamer who, with feet in the sun and head in the shade, according to the *Zafari* method (*see Victor Hugo's play 'Ruy Blas', scene III*), thinks of nothing and thinks of everything, gazing, from the foot of the Campanile, at Sansovino's Loggetta, or at the blue sea and the isle of San Giorgio Maggiore, beyond the end of the Piazzetta.

On the serpentine capitals which support this arch, crouch two monsters from the Apocalypse, those extravagant forms glimpsed by Saint John in his visions on the island of Patmos: one, which has a curved beak like an eagle, holds a little heifer her legs folded beneath her; the other, which is part lion and part griffin, sinks its nails into the body of a child laid before it. One of its claws seems to poke out the eye of its victim.

The corner is formed by a squat detached column, which carries a bundle of five columns on its broad capital. On the vault of this open portal, covered with plaques of varied marble, there is a mosaic eagle, holding a book between its talons.

At either side of the arch, at a higher level, beautifully carved statues of two cardinal virtues, are revealed: Fortitude, caressing her familiar lion which stands there like a contented hound, and Justice holding her sword, with the air of a *Bradamante* (*see Boiardo's and Ariosto's epic poems of Orlando*). The sacristan baptises one with the name of Venice, and the other with the name of the Queen of Sheba (*see her speech in the Bible, I Kings 10:9 'therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice.'*).

Malachite inlays, various enamels, two little mosaic angels unfolding the cloth that holds the divine imprint, a large barbarous Madonna presenting her son to the adoration of the faithful, and flanked by two lamps which are lit every evening; a bas-relief of peacocks spreading their tail, brought here perhaps from an ancient temple of Juno; a Saint Christopher

loaded with his burden, capitals woven into the shapes of baskets, and charmingly capricious; these are the riches that this angle of the Basilica presents to pedestrians in the Piazzetta.

The Basilica's other lateral side overlooks a small square, an extension of the Piazza. At the entrance to this square squat two red marble lions, first cousins to those of the Alhambra in the naive fantasy of their forms and the grotesque ferocity of their muzzles and manes; they have acquired a prodigious polish, for since time immemorial the little city urchins have spent their days clambering over them and employing them like acrobats' horses. At the end rises the palace of the Patriarch of Venice, of recent construction, most gloomy to look at, if it were not lost in the shadow of St Mark's; while the ancient church of San Basso has a side facade on the square.

This side of the Basilica is a little less ornate than the other: it is covered with medallions, mosaics and enamels, cartouches, arabesques from all times and all countries, birds, peacocks, and oddly-shaped eagles like heraldic alerions and martlets. The lion of Saint Mark also plays its role in this symbolic menagerie: the hollow of the porches is filled, either by small windows surrounded by palms and arabesques, or by inlays of Classical or Byzantine fragments; in the medallions men and animals struggle together. If one looks closely, one may find a sacrificial Mithraic bull struck in the neck by the priest, for no religion is missing from this naive pantheist temple. Indeed, here is Ceres, seeking her daughter, a burning pine-branch in each hand for a torch, mounted on a chariot drawn by two rearing dragons. She looks like a Hindu idol, so archaic is the style, recalling the sculptures of Persepolis. It forms a strange pendant to Abraham sacrificing Isaac in bas-relief, which must date back to the earliest times of Christian art.

Another bas-relief composed of two lines of sheep, six on each side, looking at a throne, with each group backed by a palm tree, worried me greatly, because I would have liked to understand the meaning, and made vain efforts to decipher the inscription in Gothic letters or abbreviated Greek which doubtless indicates the subject. These sheep are perhaps cattle, and then the subject of the bas-relief would be Pharaoh's dream. An ancient fragment, embedded in the wall a little further on, shows an initiate to the mysteries of Eleusis setting a crown on a mystical palm, which does not prevent Saint George sitting squarely on his Greek style throne on the archivolt, and the four Evangelists, Mark, John, Luke and Matthew taking their walks on the tympanums, gables, and vaulting, alone or accompanied by their symbolic animals.

The north porch which provides entrance to the arm of the cross formed by the Basilica is surrounded by deeply-incised ribbing, hollowed out and carved with a charming wealth of branches, foliage, and angels; a delightful Virgin serves as the keystone to the vaulting; above the door curves a heart-shaped ogive, indented at the base like those of the mosque of Cordoba, an Arabic fantasy amended at some time with a prettified Christian Nativity, having a somewhat unctuous feel to it. In addition to all this, it only remains for me to mention a Saint Christopher; apostles and saints framed in red and white marble, in a checkerboard pattern; and a lovely Our Lady, full face, hands open as if to let blessings fall, between two angels kneeling in adoration.

I have spoken, in my description above, of a porphyry head embedded in the balustrade, above the column-base on which bankrupts used to sit. According to a popular tale, whose

accuracy I cannot guarantee, when the Count of Carmagnola (*Francesco Bussone*), after great services rendered to the republic, sought to seize power, the Council of Ten, in order to satisfy justice and yet recognise his efforts, had him beheaded, but also erected a monument to his memory, which consists of this porphyry head on its base, a strange likeness lacking a body, seemingly exposed, on the balustrade, like that of the leader of some band of criminals; though the pillory is Saint Mark's, the sacred place, the Capitol and Palladium of Venice. When it was necessary, following his condemnation, to put the hero to the torture, so as to obtain the necessary confession from him, in accord with the ideas of the time, his upper limbs, which had been exercised valiantly on behalf of the State, were respected, and they set fire instead to the soles of his feet, a combination of deference and cruelty appropriate to the legend.

## **Part IX: St Mark's Basilica – The Interior**

**P**edestrians on the Mole, and in the Piazzetta, note two small lights that invariably shine on the flank of Saint Mark's, at the height of the balustrade, in front of the Madonna depicted in mosaic on that face of the Basilica.

There are two different legends about these lights, whose authenticity is accepted by the sacristans and the gondoliers. I will give both versions, without comment.

The first version is as follows. During the days of the republic, a man was assassinated in the Piazzetta. The murderer, disturbed by some noise, let the sheath of his dagger fall as he fled. A baker who was passing by, on his way home, saw the scabbard, adorned with silver, gleaming and stooped to pick it up, not seeing the corpse slumped in the shadows. The officers who appeared, stumbled against the corpse and, on discovering the man a few steps from the victim, arrested him and, having searched him, found the sheath, which the dagger, having been removed from the wound, fitted perfectly. The poor baker, despite his denials, was imprisoned, tried, condemned, and executed. A few years later, a notorious bandit, charged with various crimes and on his way to the gallows, driven by remorse, attested that the unfortunate man, put to death in his place, was innocent, and that he alone had dealt the blow.

The reputation of the poor baker was solemnly restored; the judges who had sentenced him were themselves executed, and their property confiscated to fund a mass, said annually, and an annuity, intended for the maintenance of those two perpetual lights. That was not all: the court fearing in all conscience that those flickering rays were not a sufficient memento, ordained that at the end of every capital trial, where the conviction was upheld, and the executioner was about to seize his prey, a bailiff, with imperious and fateful air, was to advance to the bench and proclaim to the judges: 'Remember the baker.' Then judgment was delayed, and the process reviewed from beginning to end, the bailiff's proclamation constituting an appeal on behalf of the guilty party.

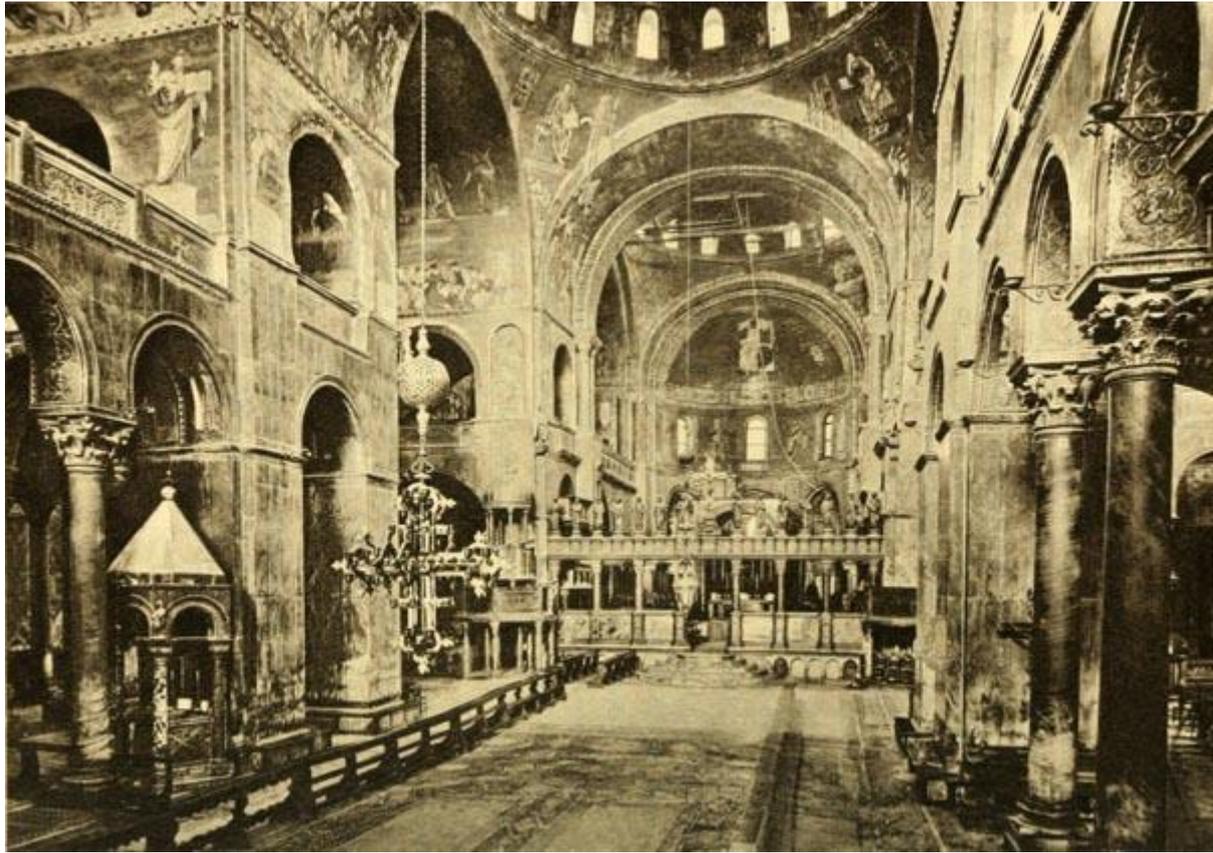
The alternative version is this: a patrician, a great lord of the republic, one day had a lugubrious fantasy to descend to the vault of his ancestors, and have their coffins opened; he witnessed something that frightened him; the corpses, instead of revealing the rigid immobility

of the dead, were contorted in violent and desperate attitudes. It seemed as if their mortal agonies had recommenced underground. He was convinced that they had been buried alive, having only appeared to have breathed their last. When he himself seemed to have reached his end, he ordained that his own body should not be lowered to the vault, until it had been retained for as long as possible. He awoke at the moment when he was about to be placed in a crimson gondola and borne to his final resting place. In recognition of having escaped this peril, he vowed to always keep two lamps lit before the Madonna, to whom he was especially devoted.

For one of these versions to be true, it is necessary that the other be false; but I am not disputatious as regards legend, and both are sufficiently indicative of the Venetian character. What is certain is that both lights arise every evening with the stars, and that, on arrival from the sea, one sees them shining at the end of the Piazzetta, like a pious thought unmoved by the noise of the city.

Before entering the church, let us regard the five domes, like silver helmets, surmounted by smaller domes with ribs like melons, and topped by Saint Andrew crosses with three gilded globes at each point. Speaking of gilding, there was a question, at a time when the republic was in its full splendour, of gilding the domes and pinnacles completely. The matter was so nearly decided, that Gentile Bellini, when commissioned to depict Saint Mark's, in his painting showing a procession in the square, gilded the bell-towers in anticipation. But Doge Leonardo Loredan, pressed for money owing to the onset of war, appropriated the *sequins*, which he employed in defeating the enemies of Venice, hence the gilding of St Mark's only exists on canvas.

The Basilica of Saint Mark's, like an ancient temple, is preceded by an atrium which elsewhere would be a whole church, and which deserves special attention. Look first, as you walk through the doorway, at a large slab of reddish marble, prominent amidst the complex design of the paving; it marks the place where Emperor Frederick Barbarossa knelt down saying: *Non tibi, sed Petro* (*not to you, but to Peter*) before that proud Pope Alexander III, who replied, superbly: *Et Petro et mihi* (*I am both myself and Peter*). How many feet, since that twenty-fourth of July 1177, have worn to dust all trace of the kneeling emperor, who sleeps still in the depths of the Kyffhäuser cave, waiting for the ravens to cease flying about the mountain!



*Venice - Saint Mark's, interior*

The three bronze doors, inlaid in silver niello and covered with figures and ornamentation, which lead to the nave, come, it is said, from Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. One of them is inscribed Leo da Molino (*the 'Procuratore di rispetto' of the Church of San Marco, in 1112, and presumed to have commissioned it*).

At the end of the vestibule, on the right, once can discern, through a gate, the Chapel of Saint Zeno, with its altarpiece and bronze tomb. The statue of the Virgin, placed between Saint John the Baptist and Saint Peter, is called the Madonna della Scarpa, the Madonna of the Shoe, because of the golden shoe which her foot occupies, which has been worn away by the kisses of the faithful: all this metallic statuary has a strangely severe aspect.

The vault of the atrium, rounded into domes, presents, in mosaic, the stories of the Old Testament. Firstly, since all religious history begins with a cosmogony, the Seven Days of Creation can be seen, depicted according to Genesis, and distributed in concentric compartments. The archaic barbarity of the style possesses something mysterious, fierce and primitive about it which suits these sacred representations. The design, in its rigidity, has the absoluteness of dogma, and seems rather a mysterious hieroglyph than a description of Nature. This is what gives these crude Gothic images a power and authority which more perfect works lack. The blue starry roundels, the gold and silver disks which represent the firmament, the sun, and the moon, the crude wavy lines which symbolize the separation of water and earth, the singular personage who, with impossible gestures of his right hand, hatches animals and trees

of chimeric form, and who hangs like a mesmerist over the slumbering first man in order to draw woman from his side, the mix of angular lineaments and dazzling tones, occupy the eye and the mind in an inextricable arabesque of profound symbolism. The verses of Scripture traced in ancient characters, complicated by abbreviations and ligatures, greatly enhances its hieroglyphic and Genesiac appearance; it is indeed a world emerging from chaos. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, the Temptation, Fall, and Dismissal from the Earthly Paradise complete this cosmogonic and primitive cycle, the quasi-divine age of humanity.

Further on, Cain kills Abel after seeing his sacrifice rejected by the Lord. Adam and Eve cultivate the land by the sweat of their brow. The words: 'Grow and multiply,' naively translate to a loving couple kissing in a bed whose curtain is raised, and which seems to involve somewhat more advanced cabinet-making than that available at the time. The four columns against the wall, below these mosaics, as ornamentation since they support nothing in particular, are of white and black oriental marble of great rarity, and were brought from Jerusalem, where tradition claims them to have been part of Solomon's temple. Hiram the architect would certainly not consider them out of place in Saint Mark's Basilica.

On the next vault, Noah builds an ark, at God's command, in anticipation of the Flood, an ark to which, all the animals of creation gather, pair by pair, an admirable subject for a naive mosaicist of the thirteenth century. Nothing is more charming than to see this fantastic zoology, akin to those of coats of arms, arabesques, and fairground menagerie signs, unfold on a golden background; the Flood is very formidable and most dismal, in style quite different from that much vaunted painting by Poussin. The crests of the waves are strangely entangled with the lines of rain, which look like the teeth of a comb; the crow, the dove, the disembarkation, the sacrifice of thanksgiving; nothing is missing. There the antediluvian cycle closes. The Bible verses, which meander everywhere like the inscriptions of the Alhambra and are part of the ornamentation, explain each phase of this vanished world: always the idea accompanies the image. The Word hovers everywhere above its artistic representation.

The story, interrupted for a moment by the entrance porch decorated with mosaics of the Virgin with the Archangels and prophets, continues on the next vault. Noah plants his vineyard and becomes inebriated; the separation of peoples takes place. Shem, Ham and Japheth, blackened by the paternal curse, each give birth to a part of the human family. The Tower of Babel raises the naive anachronism of its Byzantine architecture to the sky, which draws God's attention, concerned at seeing himself approached too closely. The confusion of languages compels the workmen to discontinue their work. The human species, which until then was one and spoke the same tongue, begins its long wanderings through the unknown world, to find its place and reconstitute itself.

The succeeding domes, the first in the vestibule, and the rest in the gallery which faces the Piazzetta dei Leoni, portray the story of the patriarch Abraham in all its detail, and those of Joseph and Moses, the whole accompanied by prophets, priests, Evangelists, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Elijah, Samuel, Habakkuk, Saint Alipius, Saint Simeon and a host of others who are grouped together or isolated on the arches, the pendentives, and keystones, wherever a figure can be accommodated careless of its comfort, and its anatomy, and willing to break an arm or a leg to adorn an awkward angle.

All these biblical legends, full of naive detail, and curious oriental borrowings, superbly uncivilised in character, are positioned on a field of gold whose brilliance darkens and contrasts with them. I like these old mosaics, executed probably by Greek artists drawn from Constantinople, far more than the more modern mosaics which aspire to be paintings, for example, that which covers the wall of the gallery, on the San Basso side, below the story of Abraham, representing the Judgment of Solomon, executed from designs by Salviati. Mosaic, like stained glass, should not seek to imitate nature; typical forms strongly delineated, bold colours, intense local tones, gold backgrounds removing the idea of it being a painterly art, that is what suits it. A mosaic is an opaque stained-glass window, just as a stained-glass window is a transparent mosaic. The palette of the master mosaicist is composed of coloured stones, that of the painter on glass of gemstones: neither should seek the truth.

At the end of this gallery, on the tympanum of a doorway, I greatly admired a Madonna, seated on a throne between Saint John and Saint Peter and presenting the child Jesus to the faithful. It is one of the most beautiful mosaics of the Basilica. The head, with its large fixed eyes, penetrating you without looking directly at you, possesses something imperial and imperious in its appearance despite its gentleness. One would think that Helena or Irene had embroidered, in Byzantium, the cushion on which she rests: the 'Mother of God', as her Greek monogram says, and 'Queen of Heaven', could not be represented in a more majestic way. Certain barbarities of drawing, one might consider hieratic, grant this admirable figure the appearance of an idol, an *icon*, to employ the term used by the Greek Church, which seems to me essential in matters of holiness.

Beneath this gallery there are three tombs, one of which is remarkable in its antiquity, its surface presenting Jesus Christ and the twelve apostles ranged above a line of censer-bearers.

To finish with matters external to the church itself, let us enter the baptistery chapel, which is attached to the cathedral only by means of a communicating doorway.

The altar is made from a stone brought from Tyre, in 1126, by Doge Domenico Michiel: according to tradition, it was on this stone that Jesus Christ stood when he spoke to the Tyrians. I will not question the popular opinion. If it is doubtful from a historical point of view, is it not a poetically beautiful idea to have made of this lump of rock, from which the Reformer, still barely known, announced his good news to the crowd, an altar, within this temple bathed in gold and radiant with masterpieces? Is it not, in fact, upon this humble stone, rendered divine by the feet of the celestial preacher, that all the cathedrals of the Christian world are founded?

The altarpiece, which the Spanish call *el retablo* the Italians *la pala*, and we French *le tableau d'autel*, consists of a mosaic of Saint John baptising Jesus Christ, between two angels carved in bas-relief; Saint Theodore and Saint George, on horseback, are pendant on each side, while above, the mosaic offers a large crucifixion, with its saintly women, on a background of gilded architecture.

The dome represents Jesus Christ in glory, surrounded by choirs of heads and wings arranged in circles. It glows, pulses, flickers, blazes and swirls, strangely: archangels, thrones, dominations, virtues, powers, principalities, cherubim, seraphim, a concourse of heaped-up oblong heads, intertwine their many-coloured wings in the form of an immense rosette as on a

Turkish carpet. At the feet of Power, twists the Devil enchained, and Death defeated crawls before Christ triumphant.

The next dome, of very singular appearance, shows the twelve apostles each baptising Gentiles from a different country. The catechumens (*converts*), according to the ancient custom, are immersed in a tank or basin up to their armpits, and the lack of perspective yields constrained attitudes and pitiful looks which make the baptisms seem like scenes of torture. The apostles, with huge eyes and hard, fierce features, look like their executioners and torturers. Four doctors of the Church, Saint Jerome, Saint Gregory, Saint Augustine and Saint Ambrose, occupy the pendentives. The black crosses with which their dalmatics (*long-sleeved tunics*) are sown have something sinister and funereal about them.

This characteristic is common to the entire chapel. The mosaics, of great antiquity, the oldest in the church, are fiercely barbaric, and reveal a relentless, savage Christianity.

In the arch of the vault, there is a large medallion representing a Christ of terrible aspect; this is no longer the gentle and blond Christ, the young Nazarene with blue eyes, of whom we know, but a severe and formidable Christ, with a beard that flows in grey waves like that of God the Father, whose age is also his, since the father and the son are co-eternal; indeed, an eternal wrinkle furrows his brow, and his lips are pursed, ready to launch anathema: one might think he despairs of the salvation of the world that he saved, or that he repents of his sacrifice. Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction, has no darker or more threatening a face in the rock-cut pagoda of Ellora (*see the Kailasa cave*). Around this avenging Christ are grouped the prophets who announced his coming.

On the walls, the story of Saint John the Baptist unfolds. We see the angel announcing, to Zechariah, the birth of the Precursor; his life in the desert, clad in the hairy skin of a wild beast; his baptism of Jesus Christ in the Jordan, a mosaic more Hindu than Byzantine, more Caribbean than Hindu, both his lean body and the water represented by blue and white wavy lines possessing a baroque appearance; Salome's dance before Herod; and the severing and presentation of the detached head on a silver plate, a favourite subject of Juan de Valdés Leal. In these latter depictions, Herodias, dressed in a long dalmatic lined with miniver, recalls those dissolute empresses of Constantinople, those great courtesans of the Lower Empire, Theodora, for example, luxury-loving, lascivious and cruel. A singular symmetry is signalled by the scene at the feast, to which Herodias brings the severed head while a server arrives with a pheasant on a plate, at the other side of the table. The dish of meat and the relic of murder are naively juxtaposed together to dreadful effect.

The baptismal font consists of a basin of marble with a bronze cover, the bas-reliefs of which, executed in 1545 by Desiderio da Firenze, and Tiziano Minio, both students of Jacopo Sansovino, to his design, recall various motifs from the story of Saint John. A statue of the saint, also of bronze, by Francesco Segala admirably crowns the work. The tomb of Doge Andrea Dandolo is attached to the wall.

Let us now enter the Basilica. The door is surmounted by a Saint Mark in pontifical vestments, according to a design by Titian executed by the Zuccati brothers (*Valerio and Francesco*), about whom George Sand wrote her charming short story *Les Maîtres Mosaïstes*.

The mosaic has a glow that makes one understand why jealous rivals accused the skilful artists of using paint instead of traditional resources. Let me say, swiftly, that the interior transom displays a Christ, between his mother and Saint John the Baptist, in a beautiful late-empire style, imposing and severe, so as not to turn our eyes away a moment from the admirable spectacle about to be offered to us.

Nothing compares to Venice's Saint Mark's, not Cologne, nor Strasbourg, nor Seville, nor even Cordoba's Mosque: the effect is surprising and magical. One's first impression is of a cavern of gold encrusted with precious stones, splendid and sombre, but at the same time glittering and mysterious. Are we in a building or a huge jewelled casket? That is the question at issue here, since every architectural idea one possesses is here placed in doubt.

Domes, vaults, architraves, walls are covered with small tubes of golden crystalline glass, created on the island of Murano, of an unalterable brilliance, among which the light quivers as on the scales of a fish, and which serve as a field for the inexhaustible fantasy of the mosaicists. Where the lower gold background ends, at column height, begins a covering of the most precious and varied marbles. From the vault hangs a large chandelier in the shape of a four-armed cross, with fleurs-de-lis at its tips, suspended from a gold ball with filigree piercing, and producing a wonderful effect when lit, an effect similar to that which the diorama has popularised in France. Six striped, alabaster columns with capitals of gilded bronze, in a fanciful Corinthian style, bear elegant arches over which sits a balcony which surrounds almost the entire church. The dome, with the Paraclete at its hub, ribs for spokes, and the twelve apostles round its circumference, presents an immense wheel, in mosaic.

Elongated angels with serious faces, cast the shadows of their black wings, illuminated with vivid light, on the tips of the pendentives. The central dome, rising above the Greek cross formed by the intersecting arms of the basilica, offers, in its vast cup, Jesus Christ seated in a segment of the sphere, in the centre of a starry circle supported by two pairs of seraphim. Above him, the divine Mother, standing between two angels, adores her son in his glory, and the Apostles, each separated by a naive-looking tree symbolising Gethsemane, the garden at the foot of the Mount of Olives, form a heavenly court about their master; theological and cardinal virtues are nestled in the inter-columns of the windows of the small dome which lights the vault; the four Evangelists, seated in castle-shaped niches, write their precious books at the base of the pendentives, the extreme tips of which are occupied by emblematic figures each with an urn tilted on their shoulder, pouring forth the four rivers of paradise, the Gihon, Pishon, Tigris and Euphrates.

Further on, in the next dome, the centre of which is filled by a medallion of the mother of God, the four creatures associated with the Evangelists, here delivered from guarding their masters, posed in chimerical and threatening attitudes, their teeth, claws, and glaring eyes showing each as akin to the dragon of the Hesperides, devote themselves to the care of the saints' manuscripts.

In the depths of the quarter-sphere which gleams vaguely behind the great altar, the Redeemer is depicted in gigantic, disproportionate form, to mark, according to Byzantine custom, the distance between the divine personage and the weak creature, Like the Jupiter of Olympus, this Christ, if he rose, would carry away the vault of his temple.

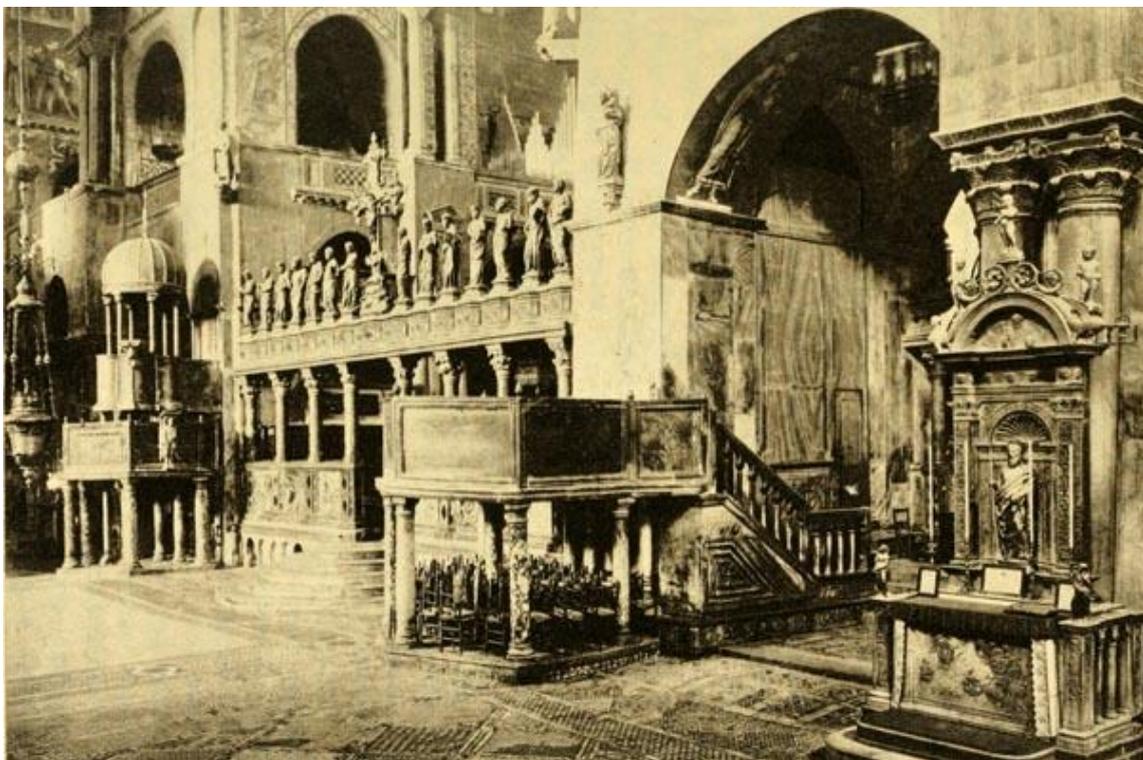
The atrium of the basilica, as we have described, displays the Old Testament: the interior contains the New Testament entire, with the Apocalypse as epilogue. The Cathedral of Saint Mark is a Bible of gold, historiated, illuminated, flowery, a missal of the Middle Ages on a giant scale. For eight centuries, the city has turned the leaves of this monument like a picture-book without wearying in its pious admiration. Beside the image is the text; everywhere ascending, descending, surrounding, are inscriptions, writings in Greek and Latin, leonine verses, couplets, sentences, names, monograms, examples of the calligraphy of every country and every age; everywhere black-letter traces its outlines on the golden page, throughout the mingled colours of its mosaics; it is even more the temple of the Word than the church of Saint Mark, an intellectual temple which, without adherence to any specific order of architecture, is built upon verses from the old and new faith, and seeks its ornamentation in the presentation of doctrine.

I shall not attempt a detailed description which would require a specialist work, but I would, at least, like to convey the dazzling and vertiginous impression created by this world of angels, apostles, Evangelists, prophets, learned doctors, figures of all kinds, who populate the domes, the vaults, the tympana, the double arches, pillars, pendentives, the smallest fragment of wall. Here the genealogical tree of the Virgin extends its bushy branches which bear fruit in the form of kings and holy personages, and fills a vast panel with its strange foliage; there a view of paradise shines in its glory, with its legions of angels and the blessed. This chapel contains the story of the Virgin; that vault unfolds all the drama of the Passion, from the kiss of Judas to the appearance of the female saints, passing through the agony of the Garden of Olives and that of Calvary. All those who testified on behalf of Jesus, through prophecy, preaching, or martyrdom, are admitted into this vast Christian Pantheon. Here is Saint Peter crucified head-downwards, Saint Paul beheaded, Saint Thomas before the Indian king Gondophares (*possibly Gondophares IV*), Saint Andrew suffering his martyrdom; none of the servants of Christ is forgotten, not even Saint Bacchus. Greek saints little known to us, we Latins, swell this sacred multitude: Saint Phocas, Saint Demetrios, Saint Procopios, Saint Hermagoras, Saint Euphemia, Saint Erasmos, Saint Dorothea, Saint Thecla, all the beautiful exotic flowers of the Greek calendar, which one might think painted according to the recipes in the manual of some monk from the monastery of Agia Lavra, blossom here, on these trees formed of gold and precious stones.

At certain hours, when the shadows deepen, and the sun only throws only an oblique shaft of light onto the vaults and domes, strange effects are produced before the eyes of the poet and the visionary. Fierce bolts of lightning spring forth, suddenly, from the golden depths. The little crystal cubes seethe here and there like the sea beneath the sun's rays. The outlines of the figures shimmer in this glittering network; the silhouettes delineated so clearly, become in an instant cloudy and blurred to the eye. The stiff folds of their garments seem to soften and float: a mysterious life enters into these immobile Byzantine characters; the fixed eyes move, the arms are agitated in Egyptian gestures, the feet are unsealed from their mounts; the eight-winged cherubim wheel; angels unfold their long, azure and purple feathers, nailed to the wall by the implacable mosaicist; the genealogical tree shakes its green marble leaves; the lion of Saint Mark stretches, yawns, and licks its claws; the eagle sharpens its beak, and preens its plumage; the ox turns about in his stall and chews the cud, his dewlap flapping. The martyrs

rise from their griddles or detach themselves from their crosses. The prophets talk with the Evangelists. Learned doctors make wise observations to young saints, with smiles on their porphyry lips; The mosaics' characters form ghostly processions going to and fro on the walls, circulating on the platforms, and passing in front of you shaking their golden hair in glory. It is all dazzlement, vertigo, hallucination! It is then that the true meaning of the cathedral, its deep, mysterious, solemn meaning seeks to emerge. It seems a temple of Christianity prior to Christ, a church devised before religion. The centuries retreat into an infinite perspective. Is this Trinity not a *trimurti* (*the Hindu Triad*)? Does this Virgin hold Horus or Krishna on her knees? Is this Isis or Parvati? Does this figure on the Cross suffer the Passion of Jesus, or the self-sacrifice of Vishnu? Are we in Egypt or India, in the Temple of Karnak or the Jagannath Pagoda? Do these figures in constrained poses differ much from those processions of colourful hieroglyphs that revolve around the pylons, or descend into the tombs?

When one lowers one's eyes from the vault to the ground, one sees, on the left, a small chapel erected to a miraculous statue of Christ, which, struck by a desecrator, poured blood. The dome, supported by columns of exceeding rarity, including two in white and black porphyry, is crowned by a globe formed from the largest agate in the world. Beyond is the choir, with its balustrade, porphyry columns, and row of statues sculpted by Jacope dalle Masegne and his brother Pierpaulo, and its large silver cross by Jacopo di Marco Benato; its two pulpits in coloured marble; and its altar, which we glimpse beneath a canopy between four Greek marble columns created, like carved Chinese ivories, by patient hands that depicted the whole story of the Old Testament in figurines a few inches high.



*Venice - Saint Mark's, presbytery and pulpits*

The altarpiece, known as the Pala d'Oro, has, as its casing, a partitioned frame in the style of the Lower-Empire. The *pala* itself is a dazzling mass of enamels, cameos, niellos, pearls, garnets, sapphires, gold and silver openwork; a painting in jewels, representing scenes from the life of Saint Mark, who is surrounded by angels, apostles and prophets; this altarpiece was made in Constantinople in 976, and restored in 1345 by Giovanni Bonesezna, who, when signing his work, asked, piously, for prayers to be said on his behalf.

The altar behind, the hidden altar, has remarkable alabaster columns, among which there are two of extraordinary transparency. Near this altar is the marvellous bronze door on which Sansovino portrayed, beside his own, the portraits of Titian, Palma Vecchio, and Aretino, his great friends. This door leads to the Sacristy whose ceiling is decorated with admirable mosaic flowers and arabesques, executed by Alberto Zio, Marco Rizzo and Francesco Zuccato, based on Titian's designs. It is impossible to find anything richer, more elegant or more beautiful.

I need more space than I have at my disposal to describe, in detail, the chapel of Saint Clement, that of the Madonna del Mascoli, in which there is a magnificent altarpiece, or the wonders of art that we encounter at every corner: sometimes it is a Madonna and child in alabaster, of an exquisite sweetness, sometimes a charming bas-relief, in which peacocks make haloes of their tails, or else a Turkish ogive embroidered with Arabic lacelike stonework, or a roundel with arabesques in enamel, a pair of bronze candelabras, ornate enough to discourage Benvenuto Cellini, or some other curious or venerable object of art or devotion.

The mosaic paving, which undulates like a sea, due to the age and compaction of the slabs, offers a most marvellous variety of arabesques, rinceaux, fleurons, lozenges, interlaced garlands and leaves, chessboard-patterns, cranes, griffins, chimeras, tongued, winged, hoofed, crawling, climbing; monsters of the art of heraldry. There is enough material there to provide centuries of designs for the Gobelins and Beauvais tapestry-makers. One is, in truth, rendered fearful and confused by the creative ability deployed by humankind on fantastic ornamentation. It is a whole world as varied, as dense, as teeming as the greater world, and one which draws its forms only from itself.

How much time, care, patience, genius, and effort, over eight centuries, it has taken to create this immense accumulation of treasures and masterpiece! How many gold coins have been melted to form the glaze of the mosaics! How many ancient temples and mosques have yielded their columns to support these domes! How many quarries have exhausted their veins to provide these slabs, these pillars, this cladding of Verona marble, Portoro marble, lumachelle, bluestone, red alabaster, cipolin, veined granite, mottled granite, ophite, red porphyry, black and white porphyry, serpentine, and jasper! What armies of artists, succeeding one another, generation on generation, have designed, chiselled, sculpted in this cathedral! Not to mention the humble anonymous workers of the Middle Ages, lost in the obscurity of time, entombed in their works. What lists of names could be assembled, worthy of being registered in the golden book of art!

Among the painters who provided the designs for the mosaics, for there is not a single painting in Saint Mark's, were Titian, Tintoretto, Palma Vecchio, Il Paduano (*Ottavo Leoni*),

Guiseppe Porta known as Salviati, Antonio Vassilacchi known as Aliense, Girolamo Pilotti, Sebastiano Ricci, and Tiziano Vecellio known as Tizianello; among the master mosaicists, at the head of whom we must place Maestro Piero, maker of the colossal Christ Pantocrator which occupies the end of the church, the Zuccati brothers (*Valerio and Francesco*), Bartolomeus Bozza, Vincenzo Bianchini, Luigi Gaetano, Michele Giambono, and Giacomo Passerini; among the sculptors, all people of prodigious talent, whom I am surprised not to find better known, Pietro Lombardo, Pietro Campanato, Giovanni (*Zuane*) Alberghetti, Paolo Savi, the brothers dalle Masegne (*Jacopo and Pierpaolo*), Jacopo di Marco Bennato, Jacopo Sansovino, Pietro di Zuane Campanato, Lorenzo Bregno, and a thousand others, of whom but a single one would suffice for the glory of an era.

Though this is not a century of ardent belief, Saint Mark's always reveals a small group of the faithful in some corner listening to the Mass, or isolated devotees praying before a particular saint, a cherished or privileged Madonna. Old women abound as everywhere; but there are also young people whose fervour is no less, kissing the feet of statues, touching their hands to the images while making the sign of the cross, and raising to their lips atoms of holiness gathered by their fingers; a respectable puerility, a childishness, of a living faith, about which we may smile, but which is in itself touching. Here, images carved from the hardest marble, from stone that resists the sculptor's chisel, are worn down, melted away like wax beneath the ardour and persistence of those kisses!

We witnessed a baptism at Saint Mark's, which appeared like all baptisms, except for this detail: the child was borne away in a small glazed shrine, of which only one pane was left open, as if the lustral water had just rendered him a saint.

In front of the church rise the three flagpoles, on bronze pedestals, representing marine deities and chimeras of exquisite and admirably polished workmanship, created by Alessandro Leopardi. These three standards once symbolized the kingdoms of Cyprus, Candia (*Crete*), and the Morea (*the Peloponnese*), those three maritime possessions of Venice. Now, on Sunday, the black and yellow banner of Austria floats alone, in the breeze that blows from Greece and the Orient!

## Part X: The Doge's Palace



*Venice - The Ducal Palace*

The Doge's Palace, in the form we see it today, dates from Doge Marino Faliero, and succeeds a more ancient building started in 810, under Doge Agnello Participazio, and continued by his successors. It was Marino Faliero who had the two facades built in 1355, as they are now, facing the Mole and the Piazzetta; legend has it that the work brought good luck neither to the authorising officer nor to the architect: the one was beheaded and the other hanged. Sadly, it might prove destructive to the fatal parallelism of the tale if the primary architect of the palace is proven not to have been Filippo Calendario, as I have believed until now, but Pietro Bassegio, as suggested in a document discovered by Abbot Giuseppe Cadorin. Yet the former attribution may well be true. Calendario worked on the sculptures of the capitals of the first gallery, which are masterpieces of arabesque and ornamentation and this thread is enough to connect his hanging with the sinister influence of the ducal palace.

One enters this strange building – at once palace, senate-house, court, and a prison under the government of the republic – through a charming door at the corner of Saint Mark's, between the pillars from Saint Jean d'Acre and the enormous squat column supporting the entire weight of the immense pink and white wall of marble which renders the appearance of the old Doge's palace so original. This door, called the Porta della Carta, in charming architectural taste, decorated with columns, clover-leaves, and statues, not counting the

inevitable winged lion and Saint Mark in stone, leads, by a vaulted passage, to the large interior courtyard: this quite singular arrangement, that of an entry placed outside, so to speak, of the building to which it leads, has the advantage of leaving the unity of the facades undisturbed by any projection, except that of the monumental windows.

Before passing beneath the arcade, let us take a look at the outside of the palace and note various interesting details. Above the large and sturdy column which we have just spoken about, there is a naive bas-relief representing the Judgment of Solomon, done with medieval costumes and a certain barbarity of execution which makes the subject difficult to recognize. It is at this bas-relief that the long colonnade begins which leads to every corner of the building. At the other corner, on the side towards the sea, Adam and Eve decently clad in fig leaves are to be found, and at the angle indented by the Ponte de la Pallia, the patriarch Noah, whose nudity Shem and Japheth cover, while Ham, the disrespectful son, at the turn of the wall, sneers away. The old man's arm, treated with a fine Gothic severity, reveals all its veins and muscles. On the facade of the Piazzetta, in the second register of the gallery, two red marble columns indicate the square from which death sentences were read, a custom which still exists today. The thirteenth capital of the lower gallery, counting from Saint Mark's, is also much praised, containing, in eight compartments, the corresponding stages of human life, all very finely rendered. Moreover, all the capitals are of exquisite taste and inexhaustible variety; not one is repeated. They display chimeras, children, angels, fantastic animals, sometimes subjects from the Bible or history, interspersed with foliage, acanthus-leaves, fruit, and flowers all of which highlights, wonderfully, the poverty of invention of modern architecture; several bear half-erased inscriptions in Gothic characters, needing a skilful palaeographer to read them fluently; there are seventeen arches on the Mole, and eighteen in the Piazzetta.

The Porte della Carta leads to the Giants' Staircase, which is nothing gigantic in itself, but which takes its name from two colossi of Neptune and Mars, a dozen feet in size, by Jacopo Sansovino, set on bases at the top of the ramp. This staircase, leading from the pavement of the courtyard to the second gallery, which reigns over all inside, as outside, the palace, was created, under Doge Agostino Barbarigo, by Antonio Rizzo. It is in white marble, and decorated by Antonio Bregno, and Domenico and Bernardino of Mantua, with arabesques and trophies in deep bas-relief, of a perfection to make all the creators of ornamentation, carvings, and niello work in the world despair. Here is no longer architecture, but goldsmith's work such as Benvenuto Cellini and Antoine Vechte alone could achieve. Every piece of this pierced balustrade reveals a world of invention; The weapons and helmets of each bas-relief, all dissimilar, are of the rarest fantasy and purest style; even the fronts of the steps are decorated with exquisite ornaments, and yet who knows of Domenico and Bernardino of Mantua? Human memory, already wearied by a hundred illustrious names, refuses to remember more and leaves in oblivion names deserving of glory.

At the foot of this staircase, on the end-posts, in the location where finials are normally set, are placed two baskets of fruit worn by the hands of those who ascend. One of those witty souls who like to air their malice everywhere claims that these baskets of fruit signified the state of ripeness required in those who climbed to the senate to deal with the republic's affairs. Domenico and Bernardino, if they returned to this world, would undoubtedly be most surprised

by the deep meaning that aesthetes lend to works in marble which they carved without any other concern than that of beauty, being the great artists that they were. The statues of Neptune and Mars, despite their large size and exaggerated bulging muscles, are a little flabby, by absolute standards; but, bound to the architecture, they hold their place in a haughty and majestic manner. The plinth bears the name of the artist, Sansovino, whose statuettes of apostles, and sacristy door, within Saint Mark's we consider superior.

Arriving at the top of the staircase, if one turns around, one can view the internal facade of the Bartolomeo Gate (*the Porta della Carta was built and decorated by Bartolomeo Bon and his father Giovanni*) adorned with volutes, and clad with small columns and statues, with the remains of gold-starred blue paint in the tympani of the arches. One of the statues, especially, is to be noted: it is an Eve, sculpted, in 1471, by Antonio Rizzo of Verona. A certain Gothic timidity still reigns in its charming lines, and its ingenuous pose recalls the adorable awkwardness of the attitude of the Venus de' Medici, that pagan Eve whose hand retains an absent fig leaf. The former artists of the Renaissance, who had few opportunities to treat the nude figure, added a kind of modest embarrassment and childish naivety to the subject which pleases me exceedingly. The northern façade, which faces the well-heads, was built in 1607 in Renaissance style, its columns and niches bearing statues from ancient Greece, representing warriors, orators and deities. A clock and a statue of the Duke of Urbino, (*Francesco Maria I della Rovere*) sculpted by Giovanni Bandini of Florence, in 1586, complete this severe and classic facade.



*Venice - The courtyard of the Ducal Palace*

If one lowers one's eyes towards the centre of the courtyard, one can view the two magnificent bronze well-heads. These cistern-mouths were created by Niccolò dei Conti and Alfonso Alberghetti. The one dates from 1556, the other from 1559. Both are masterpieces. They present, in addition to the obligatory accompaniment of griffons, sirens, and chimeras, various water-related subjects derived from Scripture (*notably 'Jonah and the Whale', and 'The Marriage at Cana'*). One cannot imagine the wealth of invention, the exquisite taste, the perfection of carving, and finish of the workmanship exhibited by these well-heads enhanced by the polish and patina of time. The very insides of the cistern-mouths, adorned with bronze fins, are decorated with damask-like arabesques. These two cisterns are said to contain the best well-water in Venice. They are thus well-frequented, and the ropes attached to the buckets have carved furrows, two or three inches deep, in the bronze rims.

Nowhere in Venice will you find a more suitable place to study the interesting class of female water-carriers, whose beauty is famous, though a little gratuitously, in my opinion, since, for every pretty one, I saw many who were old and ugly. Their costume is characteristic: they are crowned with a man's black felt hat, and dressed in a large petticoat of black cloth that goes up to their armpits, giving them an Empire-style waistline; their feet are bare, as well as their legs, though these are sometimes clad in a kind of knemis, or shin-guard, in the manner

of countrywomen in the Horta of Valencia. A heavy canvas shirt, pleated at the chest and short sleeves, completes their garb. They carry the water on their shoulders in two red copper buckets which balance one another. Most of these women are Tyroleans.

As we arrived at the top of the stairs, there, leaning on the bronze edge of Niccolò dei Conti's well-head, was one of these young Tyroleans, who drew up one of her buckets, full of water, with considerable effort, since she was small and delicate. Her bowed neck revealed, under her man's hat, a twist of pretty blonde hair, and a glimpse of white shoulders where her tan had not yet completely effaced the mountain snows. A painter would have made her the subject of a charming genre painting: to this method of walking bowed-down by twin buckets, I much prefer the Spanish and African practice of carrying water in an amphora balanced on the head. The women thus acquire a remarkable nobility of bearing. With their full hips and firmly-planted stance, they look like ancient statues. But enough of the water-carriers.

Near to the Giant's Staircase, an inscription can be seen, framed with ornaments and figurines by Alessandro Vittoria, marking Henri III's visit to Venice (*in 1574*), and further on, in the gallery, at the entrance to the Golden Staircase (*La Scala d'Oro*), two statues by Tiziano Aspetti, of Hercules, and of Atlas bent beneath the starry firmament, the weight of which the robust hero bears on his beefy neck. This magnificent staircase, decorated with stuccoes by Vittoria, and paintings by Giambattista Franco, was designed by Sansovino (*in 1555, and redesigned by Antonio Abboni, known as Scarpagnino, in 1559*), and leads to the library, which now occupies several rooms of the Doge's Palace; trying to describe them one after the other would be a work of patience and erudition requiring a whole volume, and would be more suitable for a guidebook than a collection of travel impressions.

The ancient Hall of the Great Council is one of the largest to be seen. The Court of the Lions, in the Alhambra, would fit comfortably. On entering, one is struck by astonishment. Due to a quite common architectural effect, the room seems much larger than the building which contains it. Dark and severe woodwork, book-cupboards having replaced the pews of the ancient senators, serves as a plinth for immense paintings which are set all around the walls, interrupted only by the windows, under a frieze of portraits of the Doges, and a colossal ceiling gilded all over, of an incredible richness and exuberance of ornamentation, partitioned into squares, octagons, ovals, with branches, scrolls and rocailles, scarcely appropriate to the style of the palace, but so grandiose and so magnificent that one is completely dazzled. Unfortunately, due to essential repairs, the paintings of Paolo Veronese, Tintoretto, Palma il Giovane, and other great masters, which filled these superb frames had been temporarily removed. I very much regretted not being able to admire that radiant, proud Venice personified in Paolo Veronese's art, which seems the very incarnation of that great master's genius.

One side of the room, that of the entrance door, is occupied entirely by a gigantic painting of *Paradise* by Tintoretto, which contains a whole world of figures. The sketch of a similar subject, which can be seen in the Louvre, gives an idea of this composition, whose subject appealed to the fiery and tumultuous genius of the masculine artist, who fulfilled the program suggested by his name, Jacopo Robusti. It is indeed a robust painting, and it is a shame that time has darkened it so greatly. The smoky darkness that covers it almost suits a hell rather than a glory. Behind this canvas, a circumstance that we were not able to confirm, there is, it

is said, an older *Paradise*, painted on the wall, in greenish monochrome, by Guariento d'Arpo of Padua, in the year 1365. It would be interesting to be able to compare the green paradise with this black one. Only Venice has paintings two layers deep.

The whole room is a kind of Museum of Versailles of Venetian history, with this difference that, if the major events are less in number, the paintings are much finer. Here I will list the subjects of these paintings, mostly of enormous size: Pope Alexander III received by Doge Sebastiano Ziani (*in 1177*), the Pope handing the *corno ducale*, 'the ducal horn' (which is the name given to the Doge's cap, from which, in fact, a curved peak emerges) to the Doge; the Venetian ambassadors presenting themselves to Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, in Pavia, as painted by Tintoretto; the Pope giving the marshal's baton to the Doge as the latter embarks, by Francesco Bassano the Younger; the Doge blessed by the Pope, by Paolo Fiammingo; Otto, Frederick's son, taken prisoner by the Venetians, by Tintoretto; Otto discussing peace with the Pope; Frederick and the Pope, by Federico Zuccaro; the arrival of the Pope, the emperor and the doge at Ancona, by Girolamo Gamberati; the Pope offering presents to the doge in Saint Peter's, by Giulio del Moro; the return of Doge Andrea Contarini, victor over the Genoese in 1578, by Paul Veronese, painted in his old age, but a painting still worthy of the master; Baldwin I elected emperor in Constantinople, in the church of Hagia Sophia, as painted by Andrea Vicentino; Baldwin crowned emperor by Doge Enrico Dandolo, by Aliense (*Antonio Vassilacchi*); Constantinople taken for the first time by the Venetians, led by the elderly Dandolo, as painted by Palma il Giovani, and for the second time by the Venetians allied with the Crusaders, in 1204, by Vicentino; Alexios, son of Emperor Isaac, invoking the protection of the Venetians in favour of his father; and the assault on Zara, by Vicentino; the conquest of Zara, by Tintoretto; Doge Dandolo making league with the Crusaders in the church of Saint Mark's, by Jean Leclerc; not counting the allegorical figures by Aliense and Marco Vecellio, lodged between the embrasures, corners, and transoms unsuited to receiving those great historical compositions.

One could not imagine a more wonderful sight than this immense room entirely covered with these celebratory paintings, in which Venetian genius, skilled in the portrayal of great events, excels itself. Everywhere velvet shimmers, silk flows, taffeta flutters, gold brocade displays its grainy orphreys, precious stones protrude, coarse dalmatics are ruffled, breastplates and helmets with fanciful carvings are patterned by light and shadow, or cast a mirror-like brightness; the sky fills, with that blue peculiar to Venice, the interstices of the white columns, and on the steps of the marble stairs are ranked those groups replete with senators, men-at-arms, patricians and pages, the commonplace figures in Venetian paintings.

In the battle-scenes, an inextricable chaos is shown, of castled triple-decker galleys, lanterns, topsails, rows of oars, turrets, war-machines, and overturned ladders downing their clusters of men; an astonishing mix of guards, convicts, seamen, and soldiers, assaulting one another with maces, cutlasses, or barbaric engines, some naked to the waist, others dressed in singular armour, or in oriental costume of a baroque whimsical style, like that of Rembrandt's Turks; all seethes and struggles against a background of smoke and flame; or of leaping waves, breaking among the galleys, their long green tongues tipped with flakes of foam. It is sad that time has added its own smoke to that of the combat in many of these paintings; but though the

eye loses, imagination gains. The years have granted these paintings, on which they have worked their effect, more than they have taken away. Many a masterpiece owes a part of its merit to the patina with which it has been gilded by the centuries.

These great historic machinations are encircled above by the row of Doges' portraits by Tintoretto, Bassano and other painters; they generally possess dark and forbidding faces, though they are beardless, unlike the idea we may have of them. In one corner, the eye halts at an empty black frame, which makes a dark tomblike hole in this chronologically arranged gallery. It is the place that the portrait of Marino Faliero should occupy, and symbolises the inscription beneath: *Locus Marini Phaletri, decapitati pro criminibus; this place reserved for Marino Faliero, decapitated for his crimes*. All effigies of Marino Faliero were likewise destroyed, so that his portrait is almost impossible to find. However, it is claimed that one exists, in a collection in Verona. The republic would have wanted to suppress the memory of this proud old man, who led it to the edge of ruin, due to a young man's jest sufficiently punished by a few months in prison. To end my comments on Marino Faliero, let me add that he was not decapitated at the top of the Giant's Staircase, as is depicted in various prints, for the simple reason that the staircase was not built until a hundred and fifty years later, but at the corner opposite, at the other end of the gallery, on the landing of a stairway since demolished.

Emerging onto the balcony of the large courtyard, we see, in the window on the left, in addition to a view of San Giorgio Maggiore and the Giudecca, a pretty statuette of Saint George, carved, it is said, by Canova, when he was studying as yet with the sculptor Giuseppe Toretto, and which I prefer to his classic works; it forms a counterpart to a statuette of Saint Theodore, Saint Michael, or some other holy warrior, in a charming and superb style, which it fails to equal, but whose neighbourhood it inhabits.

I will name, without claiming to describe in detail, the most renowned rooms of the palace. In the Sala della Scarlatti (*Scarlet Room*), the sixteenth-century fireplace is covered with the finest of marble reliefs. One can also see, set in the transom, a most interesting marble bas-relief representing the Doge Loredan kneeling before the Virgin and Child, in company with several saints, an admirable work by an unknown artist. The Sala della Scudo (*Shield Hall*) is where shields were emblazoned with the coat of arms of the then-current Doge; it is covered with geographical maps of Francesco Grisellini, who traced the discoveries of Marco Polo, long considered fables, and of other illustrious Venetian travellers, such as the Zeni brothers (*Nicolò and Antonio*) and Giovanni Cabota (*John Cabot*). A world-map, found in a Turkish galley, and engraved on wood is kept there, of baroque configuration, fashioned according to oriental ideas and decorated with Arabic lettering cut with marvellous finesse; and a large bird's-eye view of Venice, the original of which can be found at the Correr Museum, created by Jacopo d' Barbari, and influenced perhaps by Albrecht Dürer, that great artist, so imaginative and so exact, who introduced the chimera to mathematics, and spent many months in the city of the Doges. The city of gold, the Città d'Oro, as Petrarch calls it, is traced, such as it was at that time, with a scrupulous attention to detail and an odd caprice. In the sea, between the Piazzetta and San Giorgio, is placed a symbolic Neptune crowned with corals, surrounded by seaweed, bristling and scaly, slapping the water with hooped fins, and shaking a beard as jagged as the mantling of a German coat of arms. Four winds, with bloated cheeks, indicate the four cardinal points.

Bizarre vessels, galleys, galleasses, bombardes, argosies, organs, fluyts, carracks, ships of every kind, emblems of world trade, crisscross a sea of curving lines indicating waves, amidst which dolphins leap into yawning depths. In this plan, the Campanile is not yet topped with its high bell-tower: it is a simple tower only; the Zecca and the Library lack the form they reveal today; the Customs House is in its place, built differently, while Santa Maria della Salute does not yet exist. In the place where the Ponte Rialto was later built, there is a wooden bridge lined with planks, the middle of which is occupied by a drawbridge raised with chains. The general appearance of the city is familiar, since for three centuries not a single stone has been set on another in the cities of Italy.

Continuing my description: in the Sala dei Filosofi (*Philosophers*) we notice a very - beautiful fireplace from the Lombardo workshop (*of Pietro Lombardo, and his sons Tullio and Antonio*); the Hall of the Stuccoes or Priuli, is so named because of its ornamentation, and contains paintings by Guiseppe Porta known as Salviati, *Il Pordenone* (*Giovanni Antonio de' Sacchis*), and one from the workshop of Francesco Bassano; namely the Virgin, a Descent from the Cross, and a Nativity of Jesus Christ; this banquet room is where the Doge held dinners, according to etiquette, diplomatic dinners, as one would say today; there is a portrait of Henri III by Tintoretto, in a most vigorous and beautiful style, and, in front of the door, an Adoration of the Magi, a warm painting by Bonifazio Veronese, a great master of whom we possess almost nothing in Paris. The Sala delle Quatre Porte (*Hall of the Four Doors*) is preceded by a square atrium whose ceiling, painted by Tintoretto, shows Justice handing her sword and scales to Doge Girolamo Priuli.

The four gates are decorated with nobly-formed statues, by Giulio del Moro, Francesco Caselli, Girolamo Campagna, and Alessandro Vittoria; the artworks that enrich it are masterpieces; to be admired are paintings of Doge Marino Grimani kneeling before the Blessed Virgin, with Saint Mark and other saints, by Giovanni Contarini; and Doge Antonio Grimani in similar attitude before the figure of Faith, by Titian and Marco Vecellio, a superb creation full of light, in which the ceremonial style fails to harm its simplicity in any way. Opposite, Carlo and Gabriele Caliari have painted Doge Marino Grimani receiving the Persian ambassadors, a fine opportunity for two sons of Paolo Veronese and artists of his school to depict silver and gold embroidered silks, turbans, egrets, and seedings of pearls. A huge composition by Andrea Michieli, known as Vicentino, to a design by Palladio, represents the arrival of Henri III at the Venice Lido, where he is received by Doge Giovanni Mocenigo, Patriarch Giovanni Trevisan, and the magistrates, beneath a triumphal arch raised for the occasion. This great work has an opulent and sumptuous appearance, like all the paintings of wealthy times by this Venetian school, born to depict luxury.

A painting by the same Cagliari brothers, representing the Doge giving audience to state ambassadors, completes the symmetry. The ceiling partitions were planned by Palladio; the stuccoes are by Alessandro Vittoria and Bombarda (*Giovanni Battista Cambi*), to Francesco Sansovino's design; a Tintoretto, of Venice crowned Queen of the Sea by Jupiter, in the midst of a procession of other deities, occupies the central compartment.

Passing on, one reaches the Antechamber of the College, where foreign ambassadors waited to be received; the architecture is by Vincenzo Scamozzi. The envoys of the various

powers who came to present their credentials to the serene Republic would scarcely have been in a hurry to be introduced: the masterpieces, crowded at will, into this antechamber are splendid enough to render one patient. The four paintings near the door are by Tintoretto, and among his best. We know no more of this forceful artist in Paris than his *Adam and Eve* and his *Cain and Abel* in the Académie des Beaux-Arts; the subjects here are: *Mercury and the Graces*, *Vulcan's Forge*, *Pallas* accompanied by joy and abundance, who are following Mars; and an *Ariadne consoled by Dionysus*. Apart from a few somewhat forced fore-shortenings, and violent attitudes whose difficulty the artist found pleasing, once can only praise the masculine energy of the brushwork, the warmth of colour, the true flesh-tones, the feeling of life, and the virile but charming grace which distinguishes powerful talents when they are required to depict tender subjects.

But the wonder of this sanctuary of art is the *Rape of Europa*, by Paul Veronese. The beautiful girl is seated, as if on a silver throne, on the back of the divine bull, whose chest of snow will sink into the blue sea that tries to bathe, with its loving waves, the soles of Europa's feet, which she raises, urged by a childish fear of the ocean wetting her, an ingenious detail from some illustration to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, that the painter was careful not to forget. Europa's companions, not knowing that a god was concealed in the noble form of this beautiful animal, so gentle here, and so familiar, rush to the shore and throw garlands of flowers, not doubting that Europe, once departed, will name a continent and become the mistress of Zeus of the dark eyebrows and ambrosian hair. What fine white shoulders! What blonde coiled braids at the nape of her neck! What round and charming arms! How the light of eternal youth shines in this marvellous canvas, where Paolo Veronese seems to utter his last word! Sky, clouds, trees, flowers, land, sea, skin, draperies, everything seems soaked in the light of some unknown Elysium. All is fresh and ardent like youth, as seductive as voluptuousness, filled with a calm, pure energy; nothing of this gracefulness is mannered, there is nothing unhealthy in this radiant joy: in front of this painting, and it is high praise of Watteau, I thought of the latter's *Embarkation for Cythera*. Only we must substitute splendid Oriental daylight for a brightness like that of the Opéra footlights; and superb bodies, whose Greek beauty softens beneath the effects of that Venetian voluptuousness, and which are caressed by supple and lively draperies, for charming Regency dolls, in crumpled taffeta dresses. If it were given to me to choose a single piece from among the works of Veronese, this is the one I would prefer: the most beautiful pearl of this rich setting.

On the ceiling, the great artist has seated his beloved Venice on a golden throne, with the fleshy amplex and yet abundant grace of which he possessed the secret. In this Assumption, in which Venice replaces the Virgin, he forever finds fresh shades of azure.

A magnificent Tiziano Aspetti fireplace, a stucco cornice by Alessandro Vittoria and Bombarda, some bluish cameos by Sebastiano Ricci, and the columns of verde antico and cipolin framing the door, complete the wonderful decorations wherein shines the most beautiful luxuriousness of all, the luxuriousness of genius!

The Sala del Collegio, or reception room, now presents itself. Here we find Tintoretto and Paolo Veronese, the one red-haired and violent, the other calm and azure; the former employed on large sections of the wall, the latter on the immense ceiling. In this room, Jacopo and

Domenico Tintoretto painted Doge Andrea Gritti praying to the Madonna and Child; the marriage of Saint Catherine, depicting various saints, with Doge Leonardo Donato; the Holy Virgin under a canopy, with the obligatory accompaniment of angels, saints and doges; and the Redeemer, adored by Doge Luigi Mocenigo. On the other wall, Paolo Veronese shows Christ enthroned, with, at his side, Venice personified, Faith, and various angels, palms outstretched towards Doge Sebastiano Venier, who won the famous Battle of Lepanto, achieving victory over the Turks on Saint Justina of Padua's day, herself shown in the painting, along with the famous *proveditore* Agostino Barbarigo, slain in the fight, while the two lateral figures of Saint Sebastian and Saint Justina, *en grisaille*, make allusion, in the form of the first, to the victor and, in the form of the other, to the date of the victory.

The partitions of the ceiling, which is magnificent, display a total deification of Venice, by Paolo Veronese, whom this subject particularly suited. The first compartment shows us Venice powerful on land and sea ; the second, Venice supporting religion; the third, Venice, a friend of peace yet unafraid of war: the whole treated symbolically with allegorical force, grand in appearance as ever, and proud in form, against a background of bright clouds, leaving, here and there, views of a turquoise-coloured sky. As if this apotheosis were insufficient, Venice appears again, over the window, crown on head, and sceptre in hand, as painted by Carlo Cagliari (*Carletto, the youngest son of Paolo Veronese*). I will not describe the many cameos, grisailles, columns of verde antico, flowery arches of jasper, or the sculptures by Girolamo Campagna: I would never finish, and such riches are commonplace within the Doge's Palace.

I feel this account lengthening, despite myself; but at every step a masterpiece grasps me as I pass, and demands a sentence or two. How to resist! Unable to cover all, I shall leave your imagination to work. There are yet more, most admirable rooms, in the ducal palace than we have named. The Hall of the Council of Ten, the Chamber of the Great Council, the State Inquisitors' room, and many others. On their ceilings and walls the Apotheosis of Venice is elbowed aside by the Assumption of the Virgin; the Doges, kneeling before one or the other of these Madonnas, by mythological gods and heroes of fable; the lion of Saint Mark by Jupiter's eagle; Emperor Frederick Barbarossa by Neptune; Pope Alexander III by a short-skirted Allegory. Mingle with stories from the Bible, and Holy Virgins beneath canopies, the capture of Zara, peppered with more episodes than a canto of Ariosto, attacks on Crete, and Turks en masse; carve the door frames, load the cornices with stucco and mouldings; set statues in all the corners; gild everything that is not covered with the brushwork of some great artist; say to yourself: 'All who worked here, even the most obscure ones, had twenty times more talent than the celebrities of our day, while the greatest masters have spent their lives there' and then you will possess a faint idea of all this magnificence defying description. The architects, Andrea Palladio, Vincenzo Scamozzi, Jacopo Sansovino, Antonio da Ponte, Pietro Lombardo; the painters, Titian, Paolo Veronese, Tintoretto, Carlo Cagliari, Bonifacio de' Pitati, Antonio Vivarini, Palma Vecchio, Antonio Vassilacchi called Aliense, Giovanni Contarini, Giulio del Moro, the Andrea Vicentino, the whole family of Bassanos, Zuccari, Marco Vecellio, Giambattista Bazzacco, Giovanni Zelotti, Girolamo Gamberati, Giovanni Ponchino called Bozzato, Guisepe Porta known as Salviati, Pietro Malombra, Francesco Montemezzano, and Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, that delightful painter, and grand master of decadence, under whose brush the fair Venetian school expired, exhausted by its production of so many masterpieces;

the sculptors and ornamentalists, Alessandro Vittoria, Tiziano Aspetti, Francesco Segala, Girolamo Campagna, Bombarda (*Giovanni Battista Cambi*), and Pietro di Salò; all buried, in these rooms, their genius, powers of invention, and incomparable skill. Painters whose names are not pronounced once a century secured a place, even though in the most dreadful locations. It seems that genius was in the air at that critical time for the human, and that nothing was easier than to create masterpieces. Sculptors, especially, whom we never speak of, displayed extraordinary talent, and yielded nothing to the painters' finest achievements.

Close to the door of one of these rooms, one can still see, stripped of all its terrible prestige and reduced to the state of an unused mailbox, the ancient lion's mask into which informers posted their denunciations. All that is left of its mouth is a hole in the wall, the rest having been destroyed. A dark corridor leads you from the room of the State Inquisitors to the cells of the Piombi (*Leads*) and Pozzi (*Wells*), the subject of endless sentimental declamations. Certainly, there are no pleasant prisons; but the truth is that the Piombi were large chambers covered in lead, the material with which the roofs of most buildings in Venice are covered, nothing particularly cruel in itself, and the Pozzi by no means plumbed the depths of the lagoon.

We visited two or three of these dungeons; we expected architectural phantasmagorias in the style of Piranesi; with arches, squat pillars, twisting staircases, complicated grilles, and enormous iron rings sealed in monstrous blocks of stone; with air vents allowing only a greenish light to filter onto the wet slabs, and we anticipated being led by a jailer in a fox-fur cap adorned with the tail, clanking the bunches of keys on his belt. In fact, a venerable guide, with the appearance of a porter in the Marais, preceded us, candle in hand, through the dark and narrow corridors. The cells, lined with wood inside, had a low door and a small opening facing the lamp hanging from the ceiling of the hallway. A wooden camp-bed occupied one of the corners.

It was dark, and sound was muffled, but lacking in melodramatic touches. A philanthropist organising a prison might have done worse; on the walls, we deciphered some of the inscriptions that condemned prisoners, in their profound boredom, had etched with a nail on the walls of their tomb; there were signatures, dates, short quotations from the Bible, philosophical reflections suited to the location, and timid sighs at their lack of freedom; and, occasionally, the cause of the captive's imprisonment, as in the inscription for example in which the man says he was condemned for sacrilege, having been fed the flesh of a dead person. At the entrance to a corridor, we were shown a stone seat on which those prisoners were seated who were executed secretly in the prison. A thin rope, thrown about the neck, and twisted like a garrote, strangled them in the Turkish manner. These clandestine executions took place only for state prisoners convicted of political crimes. Once the execution was over, the corpse was loaded into a gondola, through a door which opens onto the Rio del Pallazzo, and was taken away to be sunk offshore, a cannonball or a stone fastened to its feet, in the Orfanello canal, which is very deep, and where the fishermen are not allowed to cast their lines.

Common murderers were executed between the two columns at the entrance to the Piazzetta. The Bridge of Sighs, which, seen from the Paglia bridge, looks like a cenotaph suspended over the water, is unremarkable within: it consists of twin corridors, separated by a partition wall, a covered way which led from the Doge's Palace to the prison, the severe and

solid-looking building designed by Antonio da Ponte, located on the other side of the canal, facing the side facade of the palace, which in turn is presumed to have been built to a design by Antonio Riccio. The name, Bridge of Sighs, given to this tomb connecting two prisons, probably derives from the plaints of those unfortunate travellers passing from dungeon to court, and from court to dungeon, broken by torture, or bemoaning their sentence. In the evening, the narrow canal, between the high walls of the two darkened buildings, lit by an isolated lamp, looks most sinister and mysterious, and the gondola that slides by, bearing some handsome loving couple who will soon breathe the fresh air over the lagoon, seems bearing a burden destined for the Orfanello canal.



*Venice - Bridge of Sighs*

We also visited the ancient apartments of the Doge; nothing remains of their original magnificence, except for an ornate ceiling, divided into hexagonal partitions, gilded and painted. Among these compartments, sheltered from the foliage and rosettes, there was a concealed spyhole through which the state inquisitors and members of the Council of Ten could view, at all hours of the day and night, whatever the Doge was doing. The wall, not content to listen with one ear, like the prison of Dionysus the Tyrant (*see 'Denis le Tyran', by Jean Marmontel*), watched with an ever-open eye, and the Doge, victorious at Zara or Candia, heard like Angelo (*see Hugo's, 'Angelo, Tyran de Padoue' Scene I*), 'footsteps behind the wall,' and felt a mysterious and jealous web of surveillance wound about him. We also saw various ancient statues transported from the Sansovino library to the ducal palace. There is a lovely group of Leda and the Swan; she resists, but so languidly, with such weary virtue, and with so arousing a refusal, that already the divine bird has covered her with his wing, like a bridal curtain. One must also halt before a bas-relief of children, in Parian marble, from the finest period of Greek sculpture; a cameo with Jupiter Aegiochus, found at Ephesus; a statue of Cleopatra; and, in particular, before two large masks of a male and female Faun, of singular expressiveness.

## Parts XI to XV - Life in Venice

### Contents

Part XI: The Grand Canal .....	87
Part XII: Life in Venice .....	92
Part XIII: Everyday Details .....	98
Part XIV: A Vicar's Debut – Gondolas – Sunset .....	104
Part XV: The Venetians – William Tell – Girolamo .....	109

### Part XI: The Grand Canal

Now, if you are not too wearied by our visit to the Doge's Palace, let us reboard our gondola and take a trip on the Grand Canal. The Grand Canal is to Venice what the Strand is to London, the Rue Saint-Honoré to Paris, and the Calle de Alcalá to Madrid, the main artery, that is, of city traffic. Its shape is that of a reversed letter S, whose lower curve embraces the city about Saint Mark's, and whose upper point ends at the island of Santa-Chiara, and the lower at the Marine Customs House (*the Dogana da Mar*), near the Giudecca canal. This S is crossed in the middle by the Rialto bridge.

Venice's Grand Canal is the most wonderful thing in the world. No other city presents so beautiful, strange, and magical a spectacle; one may find examples of architecture as remarkable, elsewhere, but never in such a picturesque setting. Here, each palace, like a flirtatious woman, has a mirror in which to admire its beauty. A superb reality is rendered double by a delightful reflection. The water lovingly caresses the feet of these beautiful facades, kissed on the brow by a golden light, and cradles them in a second sky. Small boats and bigger barges that attain its reaches seem moored there expressly as foils or foregrounds, for the convenience of painters and watercolourists.

Passing the Customs House, which, with the Palazzo Giustiniani, renamed the Hôtel de l'Europe (*Hotel Europa*), forms the entrance to the Grand Canal, cast your eyes on the carved horses' heads, as gaunt and bony as if from the slaughterhouse, beneath the wide square cornice on which stand the Atlantides supporting the ball of Fortune: does this singular ornamentation mean, given that horses are mostly useless in Venice, that they are to be disposed of at the Customs, or is it purely a whim? This latter explanation seems to me to be the better of the two, since I prefer not to employ the sort of symbolic nicety that I have blamed others for. I have already described Santa Maria della Salute, which we can see from our hotel window, and

which does not require us to halt, given the painting by Canaletto, which is, perhaps, his masterpiece. Yet here we experience an embarrassment of riches. The Grand Canal is the real Golden Book (*Libro d'Oro*), for here the Venetian nobility all signed their names, with a host of monumental facades.

Every section of wall tells a story; every house is a palace; every palace a masterpiece, and a source of legend: at each stroke of the oar the gondolier quotes you a name that is as well-known today as at the time of the Crusades; and this on both shores, over a length of more than half a league. I made a list of the palaces, not of them all, but of the most remarkable of them, yet I dare not transcribe it because of its length.

It fills five or six pages. Pietro Lombardo, Vincenzo Scamozzi, Alessandro Vittoria, Baldassare Longhena, Alessandro Tremignan, Giorgio Massari, Jacopo Sansovino, Sebastiano Mazzoni, Michele Sanmicheli that great architect from Verona, Gian Antonio Selva, Domenico Rossi, and Antonio Visentini provided the designs and directed the construction of these princely residences, not to mention the marvellous, unknown masters of the Middle Ages who built the most picturesque and romantic of them, those which grant Venice its character, and originality.

On both sides there is an uninterrupted succession of facades, all charming and variously beautiful. After an example of Renaissance architecture, with its columns and superimposed orders, follows a Medieval palace in an Arabic-Gothic style, of which the Doge's Palace is the prototype, with its openwork balconies, its cloverleaf piercings, its serrated parapet, and its turrets. Further on is a façade clad in coloured marble, decorated with medallions, and consoles (*scroll-shaped corbels*); then a large pink wall, with a large window adorned with columns; every mode of architecture is present: Byzantine, Saracenic, Lombardic, Gothic, Roman, Greek, and even Rococo; the column and the columnette, the round and pointed arch, the fanciful capitals, wrought with birds and flowers, of Acre or Jaffa, the Greek capitals seen in Athenian ruins; mosaic and bas-relief; classic severity and the elegant fantasies of the Renaissance. It is a huge open-air gallery, where one can study, from the depths of one's gondola, the art of seven centuries or more. What genius, talent and wealth were employed in this space that one can travel in less than an hour! What prodigious artists, but also what intelligent nobles, what seekers of magnificence! How sad that the patrons who knew how to commission such beautiful things only survive in the paintings of Titian, Tintoretto and Marco Moro!

Before arriving at the Ponte di Rialto, on the left, as one ascends the canal, one finds the Palazzo Dario, in the Venetian Gothic style; the Venier Palace, which presents its corner ornamented with precious marbles, and medallions, in the Lombardic style; the Gallerie dell'Accademia, a classical facade attached to the ancient Scuola Grande de la Carita and surmounted by a statue of Venice riding a lion; the Contarini Palace, designed by Vincenzo Scamozzi; the Palazzo Rezzonico, with its three superimposed registers; the Giustinian triple palace, in Medieval style, in which Natale Schiavoni lives, a descendant of the famous painter Andrea Schiavoni, with a gallery of paintings, and a beautiful young daughter, a living and breathing incarnation of a canvas painted by her grandfather; the Foscari Palace, recognised by its low door, with its two registers of columns supporting pointed arches and trefoils, where

once sovereigns lodged when visiting Venice, and which is now abandoned; the Palazzo Balbi, with its balcony on which princes leaned when watching the regattas which took place with so much pomp and splendour on the Grand Canal, in the heyday of the republic; the Pisani Palace, in the early-Germanic style of the fifteenth century; and the Tiepolo Palace, smart and relatively modern, with its two elegant pyramidions. On the right, quite close to our Hotel Europa (*Palazzo Giustinian*), between two large buildings, is a delightful *pallazzino* which consists of a window and a balcony; but what a window, what a balcony! A lacework in stone, with spiral columns, interlacing bands and pierced designs you would think possible only with a die-cutter, like those on the sheets of paper which enclose sugared almonds at baptisms, or border lamp-globes; I very much regretted not having the twenty-five thousand francs, with me, required to purchase it, because no less was demanded.

Further on, in ascending the canal, the following palaces are found: the Corner della Ca' Grande, which dates from 1532, one of the best designs by Jacopo Sansovino; the Grassi, currently the Imperial Hotel, whose marble staircase is garnished with beautiful orange trees in tubs; the Corner Spinelli; the Grimani, to a robust and powerful design by Michele Sanmicheli, its surrounding marble base carved with a Greek key pattern to beautiful effect, and which today serves as a Post Office; and the Farsetti, with its columnar peristyle, and long row of columnettes above, crossing the entire facade, occupied by the municipality. I might say, as Don Ruy-Gomez da Silva does to Charles V, in Hugo's play *Hernani*, when he shows the portraits of his ancestors: 'J'en passe, et des meilleurs: I pass over them, and others finer still.' I will, however, ask pardon for mentioning the Palazzo Loredan, and the ancient residence of Doge Enrico Dandolo, the conqueror of Constantinople. Between these palaces, are houses of equal worth, whose chimneys shaped like turbans, turrets, and flower-vases, break, fittingly, the main line of their architecture.

Sometimes a landing-stage or a piazzetta, for example the Campo San Vidal which faces the Accademia, cuts across this long series of monuments. This campo, lined with houses rendered in a bright and cheerful red, makes the happiest contrast with the garlands of vine hanging from a wine-bar's trellis; the red-hued break in a line of facades turned more or less brown by time, rests and charms the eye; one always finds some painter established there, palette on thumb, and paintbox on knees. The gondoliers and pretty girls, whom the presence of these drole characters always attracts, pose there naturally, and the artists' admirers become models.

The Rialto, which is the most beautiful bridge in Venice, has a most grandiose and monumental air; it crosses the canal by a single arch in an elegant and bold curve; it was created in 1591, under Doge Pasquale Cigogna, by Antonio da Ponte, and replaced the old drawbridge in wood that we mentioned, seen in Jacopo de' Barbari's map. Two rows of shops, separated in the middle by an arched portico, and revealing a glimpse of sky, burden the arms of the bridge, which can be crossed by one of three lanes, the central roadway, and the two outer walkways adorned with marble balustrades. Around this Rialto bridge, one of the most picturesque points of the Grand Canal, are massed the oldest houses in Venice, with their platformed roofs, planted with stakes to attach awnings, their tall chimneys, projecting balconies, their steps with uneven slabs, their large patches of red plaster, whose fallen

fragments render the brick walls bare, and their foundations greened by contact with the water. There is always, a riot of boats and gondolas, near the Rialto, amidst stagnant islands of moored vessels, with tawny drying sails sometimes adorned with a large cross.



*Venice - The Rialto Bridge*

Shylock, the Jew so eager for his pound of flesh, had his shop on the Rialto Bridge, which thus has the great honour of having furnished a setting for Shakespeare's play.

Below, and beyond the Rialto, on the banks either side, are grouped the buildings of the ancient Fondaco dei Tedeschi, whose colourful walls, of uncertain hue, suggest the frescoes of Titian and Tintoretto, and seem like fading dreams; the fish-market; the herb-market; and the old and new manufactories of Scarpagnino (*Antonio Abbondi*) and Sansovino, almost falling to ruin, where the various magistracies are installed.

These reddish manufactories, dilapidated, glazed with admirable tones of disuse and abandonment, must be the despair of the city, and a joy to artists. Beneath their arcades, however, an active, noisy population seethes, rushing up and down, to and fro, buying and

selling, chattering and laughing: here, red tranches of fresh tuna are sold, and baskets of mussels, oysters, crabs, and shrimps are borne away.

Under the arch of the Rialto bridge, where sonorous echoes ever resound, gondoliers sleep, sheltered from the sun, waiting for work.

Ascending the Canal still, one encounters, on the left, the Palazzo Corner della Regina, named for Queen Caterina Cornaro, known to Parisians through Fromental Halévy's opera, *The Queen of Cyprus (La Reine de Chypre)*, in which Rosine Stoltz sang so beautifully (*in 1841*). I no longer remember if the sets by Charles Séchan, Jules Diéterle and Édouard Desfléchin reflected the appearance of the palazzo; they may well have done so, and without loss, since the design, by Domenico Rossi, is of great elegance. The sumptuous palace of Queen Cornaro is now a public pawnshop, where the humble rags of misery, and the jewels of improvidence brought to bay, are heaped beneath its rich panelling, so as to save their owners from ruin; for these days it is not enough to be beautiful, one must earn a living too.

The Armenian College is presently located, some distance away, in an admirable building of ornate, solid and imposing design, by Baldassare Longhena. It is the ancient Palazzo Pesaro.

To the right rises the Palazzo della Ca' d'Oro (Palazzo Santa Sofia), one of the most delightful buildings on the Grand Canal. It belongs to Marie Taglioni, who has had it restored with enlightened care. It is all stone tracery, lacework, all arcaded, in Greek, Gothic, barbaric style, so fanciful, light, aerial, that one might think it made expressly as the nest of some sylph. Marie Taglioni pities these poor abandoned palaces. She has several on hand, which she maintains out of sympathy for their beauty; three or four, which she has had repaired, out of charity, were pointed out to us.

Observe these blue and white mooring posts, adorned with golden fleurs-de-lis; they inform you that the old Palazzo Vendramin Calergi has become a quasi-royal dwelling. It is the home of Marie-Caroline, Duchess of Berry, and certainly she is better housed than at the Marsan pavilion; for this palace, the most beautiful in Venice, is an architectural masterpiece, and the sculptures were carved with marvellous finesse. Nothing is prettier than the sculpted children holding shields above the window arches. The interior is filled with precious marbles; we especially admired two porphyry columns of such rare beauty that their price would buy the palace. Though I have spent a while over my description, I have not yet said all. I realise that I have failed to mention the Palazzo Mocenigo (*called 'Il Nero'*), where the great poet Byron stayed; our gondola nevertheless brushed against the marble staircase where (*in August 1819*), 'with her great black eyes flashing through her tears, and the long dark hair, which was streaming, drenched with rain, over her brows and breast', Margarita Cogni, 'La Fornarina', that daughter of the people, and mistress of her lord welcomed him on his return, with the tender words: '*Ah! can' della Madonna, e esto il tempo per andar' al' Lido?: Ah! Dog of the Virgin, is this a time to go to the Lido?*' The Palazzo Barbarigo also deserves a mention. I have not seen the twenty-two Titians that it contains, held under seal by the Russian consul, who has bought them for his master; but it contains many quite beautiful paintings, as well as the carved and gilded cradle intended for the noble family's heir, a cradle of which one might make a coffin, since the Barbarigo line is extinct, as are those of most of the ancient families of Venice;

of the nine hundred patrician families registered in the Golden Book, there remain today scarcely fifty.

The former caravanserai of the Turks (*the Fondaco dei Turchi*), so populous at the time when Venice traded with the Orient and the Indies, now presents two floors of Arabic arches, part-ruined and obscured by dwellings which have sprung up there like false mushrooms (*clitocybe rivulosa*).

At the point, approximately, where the Canareggio canal branches off, we saw traces of the siege and the Austrian bombardment; some projectiles reached the Palazzo Labia, which was set on fire, and scarred the unfinished façade of Santi Geremia et Lucia. By a strange caprice on the part of the cannonballs, which were intelligently directed, all that remained visible of one collapsed building, was a marble skull carved at the top of a wall, as if Death, in seemingly respectful fear, had recoiled from its own emblem. As you move further from the heart of the city, its life dies, and many of the windows are shuttered or boarded up; yet this sad spectacle has its beauty: it is more apparent to the mind than the eyes, constantly regaled by the more unexpected accidents of shadow and light; by a variety of buildings whose very dilapidation only renders them more picturesque; by the perpetual movement of the waters; and by that blue and pink tint which constitutes the Venetian atmosphere.

## **Part XII: Life in Venice**

**B**ehind the monumental Venice, a kind of enchanted opera set that immediately captivates the eye, and before whom the dazzled traveller usually comes to a halt, there exists another Venice, more familiar, more intimate and no less picturesque, although little known; it is of this that I am about to speak.

Committed to a fairly long stay in Venice, we left the Hotel Europa, the old Palazzo Giustiniani, at the entrance to the Grand Canal, to lodge, at the corner of Campo San Moisè, at Signor Tramontini's, in rooms left vacant by a Russian prince. Lest the words 'Russian prince', rouse, in the imagination of the reader, ideas of magnificence displaced to accommodate a poor poet like myself, one can, in Venice, achieve luxury in a palace at very low cost. A marvel, designed by Sansovino or Scamozzi, can be rented more cheaply there than an attic, in Paris, on the Rue de la Paix, and our apartment was part of a simple house plastered in pink, like most Venetian houses. This accommodation offered the prince the advantage of viewing, from his windows looking on the square, the shop of a French baker who at least possessed, if not riches, a daughter of rare beauty. What the Russian prince purchased in the way of white bread, brown bread, baguettes, sourdough, English bread, and unleavened bread, in the interest of his passion, would have been enough to feed many a family; but nothing transpired. The young baker's daughter was guarded with maternal vigilance and more care than the golden apples of the Garden of the Hesperides by the mythological dragon, and the disappointed Muscovite was forced to depart to extinguish his ardour amidst his native snow. This beautiful girl remained a mystery to us, since we failed to see her even once during a stay of some weeks. Any tenant of our accommodation was suspected of a like aspiration.

It is in no way a desire to depict the corner where we spent such a happy month which drives me to dwell on its details. I am not one of those people whose joy or sadness matters greatly to the world, and, if I sometimes reveal my own personality in these travel notes, it is simply as a means of transition, and to avoid awkwardness in narrating; however, it is not without interest to mingle with a Venice seen in dreams a Venice viewed in reality.

During our search for an apartment, we had been accosted by a Brescian adventurer, a young man of handsome features, who described himself as a student and painter, and took advantage of our ignorance of the place, and of the Venetian dialect, to render himself necessary and intrude on our privacy; since the few coins that jingled in our pockets made us appear as magnificent to his eyes as lords, relative to his personal poverty. He led us to a series of hovels, some more dreadful than the others, next to which Consuelo's little room in the Corte Minelli (*see George Sand's novel 'Consuelo'*) would have been a paradise. He was surprised to find us so hard to please, and conceived of ideas all the more splendid on our behalf. To placate our benevolence, and secure our considerable patronage, he made us the gift of one of those frail bouquets mounted on a stem, and surrounded by cardboard, which are sold in Venice for a few small copper coins. He seemed to base great hopes on the ingenious delicacy of this present, hopes which were disappointed and the loss of which he resigned himself to with some difficulty. Ice-creams and coffees did not seem to him sufficient compensation for his bouquet, and he complained with such bitterness of the expense to which the generosity of a heart, only too loyal, had led him, while in the company of foreign noblemen, that we felt obliged to offer him half a dozen *zwanzigs* (*Austrian twenty-kreutzer coins*) which he accepted with a grumble and with all the signs of wounded pride...at receiving so little.

Our lodgings had a waterside door and a landside door, giving access to a canal and the square respectively, like most houses in Venice. They consisted of a proper bedroom, and a fairly large living room, separated by an ante-room opening onto a balcony with three windows, which was garnished with flowers at our instruction, and where we passed the best part of our time gazing and dreaming, while smoking cigarettes; this layout is repeated almost everywhere, in palaces as well as in the humblest of dwellings. The balcony is the focal point, generative of that type of building. These balconies hold a middle place between the Spanish *mirador* and the Arabic *mashrabiya*.

A sofa, horsehair-filled chairs, a bed wrapped in mosquito netting, a table, and a dressing-table, made up the furnishings. Parquet flooring was replaced by a kind of stucco mottled in different colours, resembling, you understand, a huge slice of galantine. Nothing of that analogy was lacking, not even the truffles, simulated by black stones. This *charcuterie* paves all the apartments of Venice. It is cool on the feet and easy to keep clean. The walls, following Italian custom, were whitewashed in a flat tempera colour and decorated with boldly-coloured lithographs, after François-Claudius Compté-Calix, which was flattering to a certain extent as regards French art, but regrettable from the point of view of local colour; fortunately, a Panagia, painted by the neo-Byzantines of Mount Athos, in a rigid and hieratically-barbaric style worthy of the ninth century, relieved, fittingly, the modern vulgarity of those shoddy images.

The presence of this Madonna with a golden monogram was due to our hostess, an amiable Greek lady, married in Venice, who lived in the apartment above ours. A sonnet, printed on

satin and neatly framed, related, with strong allusions taken from mythology, how the Ionian waves had ceded this Venus to the Adriatic waves, and how a virtuous Helen had followed an honest Paris across the sea.

Helen was indeed the name of the young woman, but the resemblance did not extend as far as the bridegroom, whose name was Guiseppe Tramontini. Signora Elena had completed her recovery from childbirth and still retained the sweet paleness of hands and face which is seemingly the reward of young mothers. Married very early, she had already had several *advocates*. Let this sentence in no way make one suspect the chastity of this charming woman. Although people live to a good age in Venice, children thrive poorly there, and many die very young. These little innocents, going straight to heaven, plead their parents' case in God's court. Hence the name *advocates*. Does that hope, though, console one quite as easily for their loss?

The rest of the household consisted of a young nanny from the Friulian Alps, a peasant girl with thin cheeks, a hooked profile, and large, wild, surprised eyes, who bounded upstairs from step to step, the baby on her arm, like a timid goat jumping from rock to rock, and an old servant called by the poetic name of Lucia, which was in scant agreement with her spiky bottlebrush hair, brown and rancid skin, squinting eyes, thick-lipped mouth, loud voice, and the appearance of a Leonardo grotesque, or a Maritorne (*see Cervantes' 'Don Quixote'*).

As I said, our accommodation had a view of the square and the canal. Why should a description of this dual aspect not possess the interest of a watercolour by Jules-Romain Joyant, or William Wyld, who have made thus a host of familiar little sketches of narrow streets, corners, canals, towpaths under bridges, picturesquely cluttered passageways? Is the pen more awkward than the brush? Let me try.

At the end of the square or, as they say, of the campo, rises the church of San Mois , with its flamboyant rococo facade, tortured, almost savage, in its violent exaggeration. This is not the bland, flabby, old-fashioned wrinkled rococo which we are accustomed to in France, but a robust bad taste, full of strength, exuberance, invention and caprice; the scroll-shaped volutes twist about like flourishes in stone, the consoles make brusque sallies, the architraves are interrupted by rows of deep indentations, sculpted allegories lean together on the slopes of the tympani with impossible postures in the style of Michelangelo. In their niches, statues with sinuous contours, and bulging draperies, adopt the pose of military leaders or dancing masters. The bust of the founder, moustachioed and formidable, at the summit of the pyramidion which supports it, has the air of a true portrait of *Il Capitano Spavento* (*the commedia dell'arte character*). Yet the bushy chicory-leaves like cabbages in stone, the elaborate rocailles, the pierced cartouches, the Corinthian pilasters, the tormented figures, the extravagant excesses of ornamentation, produce a richly-grandiose effect despite good taste being violated in every detail, though by a vigorous imagination. Giacomo da Vignola would criticise the designer of this fanciful portal. I fully absolve him. Its strange architecture was the work of Alessandro Tremignon.

This defiant facade is connected by a flying buttress to its bell-tower, a diminutive version of the Campanile in Saint Mark's Square. In Italy, architects have always been embarrassed by bell-towers; they neither wish, nor know how, to connect them to the main building. It seems that, preoccupied despite themselves with pagan temples, they view the Catholic bell-tower as

a deformed superfetation, a barbaric excrescence; they create an isolated tower, a kind of belfry, seemingly ignoring the magnificent effect that the religious architecture of the North has derived from the former's presence. This is said in passing. I will be obliged to return more than once to the observation.

The entrance to San Moisé is equipped with a solid leather curtain, which when raised allows a vague glimpse of the church, through transparent shadow, filled with flashes of gilding, gleams of candlelight, and warm clouds of incense, together with the sound of the organ, and of people at prayer.

The bell-tower is no sinecurist: it rings and chimes all day. In the morning, with the Angelus, then the Mass, then Vespers, then again to greet the evening; its iron tongues are scarcely silent a moment. Nothing tires those bronze lungs.

Nearby, in the shadow of the church, and separated from it by an alley, as narrow as the tightest *callejon* of Granada or Constantine, and which leads to the *traghetto* of the grand canal, shelters the presbytery; a dark facade clad in a faded red, pierced with dreary windows with complicated grilles. It would mar the clear Venetian painting, if masses of wall plants, hanging in disorder, did not brighten it a little with their tender green, and if a charming Madonna, surmounting a poor-box, was not smiling there, between two lamps.

The three or four houses facing it contain the baker's house besieged by the Russian prince; a florist's, whose front, decorated with small flowerpots, displays tulips in bud or in bloom, plus rare plants, supported with sticks, and flanked by scientific descriptions; and a grocer's store forming an angle with the canal-side, lime-plastered all over, decorated with green shutters, lined with balconies, and topped by those chimneys with capitals flared in a turban shape which make Turkish cemeteries of the roofs of Venice.

On one of these balconies, a Signora often appeared, quite pretty, as far as the distance allowed one to judge, dressed almost always in black, and plying her fan with a wholly Spanish dexterity. It seemed to me that I had seen her somewhere before. Thinking about it, I realised that it was in the *Memoirs* of Carlo Gozzi. She recalled the type of the young woman at the window in his text. Perhaps it would not have been impossible to engage her in making love in a gondola, by means of serenades, gifts, and delicacies to consume, in the old Venetian fashion. But the traveller is a bird of passage who lacks the time for making love.

On the open side of the square, that of the landing stage, a bridge of white marble, with a single arch, spans the canal, and places the Campo in communication with the alley on the opposite bank which runs towards the Campo San Maurizio: the canal vanishes at one end into one of these perspectives which the many views of Venice have made familiar to the whole world; tall houses, pink above and green below, their heads in the sun, their feet in the water, their ribbed arches bearing modern bay-windows; chimneys rounded in flower pots; long striped banners hanging from balconies; vermilion or bistre tiles crowned with statues, standing out whitely against the azure sky; mooring posts illuminated in bright colours; water shimmering in the shadows; and boats stationary or brushing their black sides against marble steps amidst unexpected effects of light and shadow. This watercolour, as large as life, hung beyond our window, on the side occupied by the canal.

At the other end, the canal, as yet blocked by a fallen bridge, disgorged into *Il Canalazzo* (*the Grand Canal*) and revealed a portion of the entrance wall of the Dogana, with its bronze statue of Fortune turning in the wind on her gilded globe, as well as the rigging of vessels too loaded to penetrate the waters of the narrow canals.

Opposite us was an inn, the Star of Gold, which possessed nothing remarkable other than a terrace festooned with vine leaves, and a characteristic detail, of which I must make mention, its sign, originally written in three languages Italian, French, and German, of which the Teutonic lettering, concealed no doubt during the siege of Venice, could be made out, vaguely, beneath the daub, not having been redone out of patriotism. Such silent protests against the foreign yoke are found everywhere.

Sitting on our balcony, releasing before me lightly-floating puffs of tobacco from the Levant, I am about to pen a sketch of Venetian life.

It is still morning; the cannon-shot from the frigate, announcing that the port is open has but now sent its white smoke over the lagoon; an angelic salute vibrates from the city's thousand bell towers. Patrician and bourgeois Venice slumbers deeply as yet; but the poor devils who sleep on the steps of the houses, on the palazzo stairways, or at the foot of the columns, have already quit their beds, and shaken the night dew from their damp and ragged clothing.

Each boatman at the landing-stage washes the sides of his gondola, brushes the cloth of its felze, polishes the iron stem at the bow, shakes out the Persian carpet which lines the floor of the boat, spruces up the black leather cushions, and puts everything in order, ready to be summoned to his task.

Larger vessels bringing supplies to the city are beginning to arrive from Mestre and Fusina; from the Zuecca (*Giudecca*), a sort of maritime suburb lined with buildings on one side and gardens on the other; and from Chioggia, Torcello, and other places on the mainland or islands.

Those boats piled high with fresh vegetables, grapes, peaches, leave behind them a sweet smell of fruit and verdure, which contrasts with the pungent scent of boatloads of tuna, red mullet, octopi, oysters, sea-lice, crabs, shellfish, and other 'fruits of the sea', according to the picturesque Venetian expression.

Others, carrying wood and coal, moor by the water gates to deliver their goods, then resume their peaceful course. The wine comes not in barrels, as with us, nor in goatskins, as in Spain, but in large open vats which it dyes to a purple hue darker than blackberry juice. The epithet 'dark', which Homer never fails to apply to wine, would be perfect for these products of the vineyards of Friuli and Istria.

Drinking water to fill the cisterns is delivered in the same manner; because Venice, despite its aquatic location, would die of thirst like Tantalus, not possessing a single spring. In the past they brought water from Fusina via the Brenta canal. Now, the artesian wells, excavated by François Degoussée, happily supply most cisterns. There is hardly a campo that lacks one. The orifice of these tanks, surrounded by a coping like that of a well, furnished the most delightful motifs born of the fantasies of Venetian architects and sculptors: sometimes, around this drum, of bronze, marble, or stone, they wrapped a Corinthian capital, hollowed out in the middle;

sometimes a monstrous face; elsewhere, bacchanals involving children, and garlands of flowers or fruit, unfortunately too often worn away by the friction from ropes and copper buckets. These tanks filled with sand, in which the water remains fresh, grant a particular character to the squares; they are opened at certain times, and the women come to draw water from them, as Greek slaves did from the ancient fountains.

Ah! Here a gondola hooks itself on to another. One might compare them, on seeing them attack each other with axe-like prows, to two hostile swans plucking at each other's plumage with their beaks; one of the gondoliers failed to hear, or heard too late, the other's cry of warning, a kind of screech in some unknown jargon. A dispute begins and the two champions argue like Homeric heroes before the battle; standing on the stern, each brandishes his oar. You might think they would sink each other. Fear not, there is far more noise than action. Cries of '*Corpo di Bacco*', and '*Sangue di Diana*', wing their way from one side to the other, but soon swear words from mythology are no longer enough. Insults and blasphemies crisscross, ever-increasing in intensity: lame-duck, mud-frog, clawless-crab, sea-louse, dog and son of a cow, ass and son of a sow, murderer, ruffian, sneak, *tedesco* (*Teuton*), these are the delightful qualifications they lavish on one another. Associating the heavens with their quarrel, they insult their respective saints: 'Your Madonna's a mare not worth two candles' cries one. 'Your saint's a fool without a miracle to his name,' replies the other. I have used kinder terms than theirs.

It should be noted that their vociferations become all the more outrageous as the boats drift further away, and the interlocutors of this furious dialogue move increasingly out of reach.

Soon only a hoarse croaking is heard, which fades in the distance.

Here, an official gondola passes, the Austrian flag at the rear, bearing a stiff and chilly functionary, his chest adorned with decorations, to some inspection or other; there, another carries phlegmatic English tourists; while that one, lean as a skate, threads its way, mysteriously and discreetly, seaward. Its folded down felze, its drawn blinds, shelter two lovers who are off to lunch, indulgently, at the tip of Quintavale; this one, heavier and wider, carries beneath its *tendonetto*, striped in white and blue, a decent family going to bathe in the sea at the Lido, on that beach whose fine sand still bears the hoofprints of Byron's horses.

But now the church opens its doors. A crimson procession emerges, bearing a crimson bier, to be placed in a crimson gondola. Here one mourns in purple. A corpse is being embarked for the cemetery, located on that island in the lagoon off Murano. The priests, bearers, candlesticks, and church ornaments occupy the front of the boat. Go sleep, poor victim, beneath sand impregnated with sea-salt, in the shadow of an iron cross that the seagull's wing will brush! For a Venetian's bones, dry land is too heavy a covering.

Since I am about this funereal subject, allow me to say that in Venice, when someone dies, they affix to their house, and those in the neighbouring streets, by way of announcing the departure, a printed notice that gives the name, age, and place of birth of the deceased, and the illness to which they succumbed, affirming that they received the sacraments, and died a good Christian, and seeking the prayers of the faithful on behalf of the dead.

Let us quit these melancholy ideas; its furrow has closed behind the crimson boat; let us think of it no more. Let us be as forgetful as the water's flow, which retains not the slightest trace; it is of life, not death, we must think!

### **Part XIII: Everyday Details**

On the bridge come and go young girls, working-girls, shop-girls, domestic servants, in blouse and petticoat, beneath a long shawl; on their necks are coiled, like cables, those long twists of reddish blonde hair so dear to Venetian painters. I salute, from my window, models who sat for Paolo Veronese, who pass by without remembering that they posed, three hundred years ago, for *The Wedding Feast at Cana*. Old women, masked in the national *bauta*, hasten to arrive in time for the Mass, the last bell for which rings out from San Moisè.

Hungarian soldiers, with blue trousers, and black ankle-boots, with grey coats of woven-ticking, make the bridge resound under their heavy, regular steps, carrying wood to their barracks to heat soup or cook food for their bowls.

The Illustissimi, former nobles now ruined, displaying a proud air still, in their clean but threadbare clothes, take themselves off to Florian's, the meeting place of the aristocracy, that excellent coffee-shop, the recipe for which Constantinople transmitted to Venice, for nowhere does one drink better. Elsewhere, perhaps, these apparitions from the past would rouse a smile; but the people of Venice love their old nobility, who seem to them always both fine and familiar.

Nothing is done in the ordinary way in this city of fantasy. The music of the streets, instead of riding the hip of whoever turns the handle, is borne about by water: here, hand-organs travel in gondolas.

One happens to pass beneath our balcony; it is one of those large mechanical versions manufactured in Cremona, the home of fine violins. Nothing is less like those boxes producing false notes, whose toothless barrels fail to raise more than a few of the keys, which, at home, make the dogs howl in anguish at the corners of crossroads; trumpets, triangles, and Basque drums, form a complete orchestra, to the sound of which a set of mechanical puppets dance a ball enclosed in their wooden niche. It is like an opera overture on the march.

More than one boat deviates from its course to enjoy the melody a little longer, and the musical gondola glides forward followed by a small flotilla of dilettantes travelling the canals to follow its sound.

What boat is this that passes by, with a kind of bluish monster moored to its flank which splashes and plashes, and makes the water leap and foam? Aboard, are fishermen who exhibit a dolphin, a marine curiosity caught in their nets, and who hold out their caps to the windows, and gondolas, to gather a few coins. Strong ropes, skilfully knotted, hold the creature half in its element, half in the air, for all to see. It barely resembles that fantastic monster heraldry calls a dolphin, that chimera which holds a place between fish and ornamentation. In this large

rounded head, ending in a beak, one fails to find the heraldic pitting and prominent mantling displayed on coats of arms. Arion, with his lyre, would cut none too fine a figure astride one of that species.

Now let us take a look at the square. The picture is no less lively. The fried-fish shop, a booth of canvas and wooden planks, is open for business at the foot of the bridge; the stove is in operation, and the air is full of the odour of smoke and the pungent aroma of boiling oil: fried food occupies a significant place in Italian life. Moderation in eating is a southern virtue which is easily compounded by laziness, and there is little cooking done at home. All send out for food from these open-air eateries; pasta, fritters, octopus-arms, and fried fish, that others, less ceremoniously, consume on site!

The 'fish-fryer', forgive me a neologism needed on this trip to Italy, is a big, broad, strong, potbellied, kind of obese Hercules, a species of *Palforio* (*the innkeeper in Alfred de Musset's play 'Les Marrons du feu'*), with scarlet cheeks, a parrot's beak, ears adorned with tufts of hair, and a head of shiny black curls, like the pile of an Astrakhan lambskin hat. He squares to his role like a king on his throne, behind him three or four rows of large bright stamped-copper pans, like ancient shields hung on the bulwarks of triremes.

The seller of pumpkin, a dish the Venetians are fond of, also displays his offering in lumps that resemble loaves of yellow wax that he sells in slices. A young girl, at the window, beckons to the man, and lowers, on the end of a rope, a basket in which she retrieves a piece of pumpkin whose size accords with the money she sends down. This convenient way of gaining provisions suits the Venetian nonchalance.

A group has formed in the middle of the campo, a group soon swelled with all the passers-by and all the idlers, disgorged by the bridge, on their way, through the alley beside the church, to the Calle Frezzaria or to St. Mark's Square, the two busiest places in Venice.

A space left free at the centre of the gathering reveals a poor, dilapidated devil, wearing a mournful hat, and dressed in pitiful clothing and frayed trousers; by him is an old dreadful female companion, a combination of one of the Fates and a witch, in as wretched clothes as the man. A covered basket is placed on the ground in front of them.

A lean, dirty, hairy dog, but one with the intelligent look of a learned creature adept at all sorts of tricks, gazes at the old couple with that human look that a dog exhibits before its master: it appears to be awaiting a sign, or command.

Are we to witness the dog's performance? Yet music is lacking, and the poor creature is not dressed as a marquis.

The old man makes a gesture. The dog, all attention, races to the basket, and lifts with his teeth one of its flaps; he pauses a few seconds, then, pushes the other flap open with his nose; he emerges triumphant, holding in his mouth a little piece of folded paper, which he places at the feet of the old woman; he repeats this trick several times, and his companions take up the tickets extracted thus from the basket.

The dog is drawing lottery numbers. Those he retrieves in good condition must, infallibly, win; the lottery players of both sexes, of whom there are many in Venice, as in all poor

countries, where the hope of a sudden fortune gained without work acts vigorously on the imagination, have great confidence in the numbers fished out thus by the dog.

Viewing the deep misery, and starved faces of the couple, and the lean anatomy of the dog whose lottery numbers were to earn so many crowns, we wondered why these poor devils benefited so little from this method of winning a fortune that they granted others, so generously, for a few sous.

This simple thought had not occurred to any there. Perhaps the diviners of lottery-numbers are like sorcerers, who cannot foresee the future for themselves; clairvoyant on behalf of others, they are blind when it comes to themselves; else, these two unfortunates would have been guilty of not being millionaires at the very least.

Venice is full of lottery stations. The winning numbers, inscribed, on cards framed with flowers and ribbons, in fantastic letters of azure, vermilion, and gold, excite the greed of passers-by. In the evening, they are illuminated, brightly, by candles and lamps: the favourite numbers, the numbers which must infallibly be drawn, according to those calculations of probability dear to the lottery-players, who are as certain upon this subject as Siméon Poisson, of the Institut de France, are also exhibited with great pomp. Some players, who stubbornly follow these imaginative strategies, despite numerous disappointments, buy them nonetheless, and try again, doubling or tripling their stakes in mathematical progression.

In France, the lottery has been abolished on the grounds that it is immoral. Perhaps it is kinder not to rob the unfortunate of all hope. Why force these poor devils to accept the certainty of never possessing a single sou? The dream of a big win, the paradisial idea of a quartet or quintet of winning numbers, allows many who despair to await their end in patience.

Our gondola was due to collect us at three o'clock. Antonio was at the water gate: we had thanked the gondoliers of the Hotel Europa but rented a gondola for the month, which is less expensive and more convenient. Antonio is an amusing young lad of fifteen or so, very alert, clever, quite handy with the oar, labouring to good effect at the stern of the boat, with his Chioggiotto hat and his Indian cotton jacket with Persian designs. He has only one fault: he takes too lively an interest in the legs of those pretty women entering and exiting his gondola; the other day a little gold slipper supporting an embroidered silk stocking, descending three steps of pink marble, almost made us capsize through the efforts of our too ardent gondolier. Except for this failing, he is very pleasant; love preserves him from drunkenness. Cupid saves him from Bacchus, as the classicist might say.

Right at the end of the Ria degli Schiavoni, beyond the public gardens, at the tip of Quintavalle, on the island of San Pietro di Castello, is the house of an old fisherman named Ser Zuane, famous for its fish dinners, like the Trafalgar Tavern or the Ship Tavern at Greenwich, or like La Râpée in Paris.

We formed the idea of dining there and, making the gondola linger a little, we nonchalantly enjoyed a spectacle of which the eye cannot tire, though it be viewed every day, being so admirable, magical, and perpetually new. We saw pass before us, between sky and water, as on a panoramic scroll, the Zecca, Sansovino's ancient library, the columns of the Piazzetta, the Doge's Palace, the Bridge of Sighs, the Hotel Danieli, the Ria degli Schiavoni, lined with shops

and boats to most picturesque effect, the Cà di Dio embankment which prolongs the line of the quay, and the public gardens, whose greenery and freshness belie the idea that there is nothing in Venice but bricks, marble, and water.

Having skirted the gardens, we approached the residence of Ser Zuane, via the canal from San-Pietro di Castello; boats pulled up on the sand, picturesquely stranded; nets stretched out in the sun; and beams and planks forming a rustic landing-stage fronted his dwelling, which is very simple indeed, and would provide a piquant motif for a maritime sketch by Eugène Isabey.

The finest room in the house had been prepared for us, but we had our covers transported to the end of the garden, beneath an arbour shaded by vine and fig leaves, and from which hung a few fruits of the gourd growing there. The garden, full of vegetables, flowers, and weeds, was unkempt enough to be charming. This vegetation, bushy and free-growing, pleased us more than over-ornate planting.

Ser Zuane, though no doubt a little annoyed by this preference of ours, incomprehensible as ever to ordinary folk, for a wooden bench and a trestle table, under a mass of greenery, rather than a horsehair chair before a mahogany one, in a room full of mirrors and prints of the Rue Saint-Jacques, showed himself no less jovial or cordial towards us.

Ser Zuane's wife, who seems to enjoy despotic authority at home, is a large and cheerful gossip, of a high colour, and bastioned by formidable charms. She likes to make witty remarks to which her aged husband replies. I know not if this Philemon and Baucis of fish-frying are happy, but they have a lot of children, like the princes and princesses of fairy tales. Zuane even claims that he is still young enough to add to their extensive lineage, but his wife says that is mere pretence.

Each country has its local cuisine, its particular dishes. Marseille is proud of its bouillabaisse, aioli and clam chowder; Venice has pidocchi soup, which is pleasanter than its unsavory name. Pidocchi (sea lice) are a species of crustacean that collect in lagoons and canals. The best pidocchi are those from the basins of the Arsenal.

Pidocchi soup is a classic dish of Ser Zuane's, and any traveller who appreciates local colour owes it to his conscience to taste some, prepared by the hand of the old Adriatic fisherman. I declare, hand on stomach, a preference for bisque or turtle soup; but nevertheless, pidocchi broth, suitably well-seasoned with spices and aromatic herbs, has indeed its own charm, especially when supped beneath a Quintavalle vine.

The rest of the dinner, which a Carthusian superior-general would not have disavowed, consisted of oysters from the Arsenal with fine herbs, pinkish-white marine crayfish, mullet and sole from Chioggia poached in bouillon, red mullet, and pan-fried sardines, all washed down with wine from Valpolicella, and a Picolit from Conegliano, with, for dessert, those beautiful ruddy and golden fruits ripened in the sun on the hills of Monselice, Este, and Montagnana.

At dessert, as we drank a bottle of the wine of Samos, as warm and honeyed as a Homeric wine, the old woman came to chat with us, cheerfully and familiarly, like a hostess of former times; she offered a large bouquet, hastily plucked from her garden, and tied with rush-grass,

to the wife of a friend who shared our repast, a charming person with Spanish features, whose round white arm protruded from the black lace which bordered her sleeve.

The old woman exclaimed at the whiteness and beauty of this arm, which she kissed several times with that grace familiar to the ordinary folk of Venice, about whose respectful courtesy there is nothing servile.

The bill was brought to us, written on the back of a plate. It came to a fair amount, but we had consumed a delicious and interesting meal, and, as foreigners, we were obliged to pay a third more than a native of the country, that being the rate of exchange; there was nothing to say; so, we made not the slightest comment, and the fisherman accompanied us to the landing-stage where our gondolas awaited.

We went for a walk in the public gardens, on the island nearby; there is a large promenade planted with trees, forming an obtuse angle with the sea, terminating, at its tip, in a mound surmounted by a café frequented by drinkers and street musicians. Children and young girls have fun sliding down its gentle slopes, covered with soft grass.

The view extends across the lagoon, into the distance: one can see Murano from the top, the island where glass is made; San Servolo, where there is a hospital for the insane; and the low line of the Lido, with its dunes, restaurants, and domed trees. Rows of piles, indicating the depth of water, form species of alleyways in this shallow sea, where banks of kelp and seawrack float. The perspective is enlivened by the perpetual toing and froing of sailing boats and other vessels.

The public gardens, on feast days, contain a most delightful collection of Venetian beauties. It is there that one can study at ease the type characterised by the playwright Carlo Gozzi as *biondo, bianco* and *grassoto* (*blonde, pale, and ample*).

The presence of the Austrians must necessarily have modified the Venetian type, although unions are rare because of the natural aversion of the two nationalities for each other, and we still find, in reality, examples of the women who posed for Giovanni Bellini, Giorgione, Titian, and Veronese.

The young girls walk about in groups of two or three, most of them bareheaded their opulent blonde or auburn hair dressed with a good deal of taste. The brown hair of the south is quite rare in Venice among the women, though common in the men. I had already noticed that oddity in Spain, in Valencia, where the male population have black hair, and olive complexions, with the haggard sunburnt appearance of a tribe of North-African Bedouins, while the women are blonde, white, and bright of feature, like Lancashire farmers' wives. Yet this variation in tints is excellent. Adam was brick-coloured, Eve the colour of milk, providing painters with the happiest of contrasts.

We saw some very charming faces there, a distinctive memory of which would be difficult to reproduce without an artist's pencil. I will try to outline some of the general features. The lines of the visage, without achieving the Grecian regularity, that almost architectural regularity, which is a commonplace of true beauty, nonetheless possess a rhythm which is lacking in Northern faces, more tormented by the thoughts and multiple cares born of civilisation. The line of the nose is purer, cleaner in profile, than the noses of northern women,

always full of the capricious and unexpected. The eyes also have a bright placidity unknown to us, which recalls the clear and tranquil gaze of wild creatures: they are often very black, despite the blonde colour of the hair; the mouth possesses that *smorfia*, a sort of disdainful smile full of provoking charm, which gives so much character to the heads drawn by the Italian masters.

What is particularly charming about Venetian women, is the nape, the line of the collarbone and the summit of the shoulders. One cannot imagine anything more slender, elegant, finer, or rounder. There is something of the swan or the dove in those necks, as they undulate, bow, and bend; at the back of the head little wisps of hair of all kinds frolic, little rebellious curls, that escaped the comb's teeth, with effects of light, the gleams of the sun's rays, and patches of shadow to delight the colourist. After a walk in the public gardens, one is longer surprised at the golden splendour of the Venetian school of painters; what we thought an artist's dream is only an often-inferior translation of reality. I have followed behind some of those shapely necks, without even trying to see the face above them, intoxicated by those pure lines and that warm paleness.

I even took a most confusing walk, once, through the skein of Venetian streets, while following the beautiful neck of a girl who could make nothing of me, thinking me a most persistent and foolish gentleman.

She was a tall girl, wondrously dark-haired, with a striking resemblance to the actress Rachel (*Elizabeth Félix*) as regards the elegance of her long, fine body, and the classical lines of her shoulders. She had such perfect dignity of movement that her large red silken and woollen shawl seemed the purple cloak of a queen. Never did the great tragedienne display more beautiful or nobler folds to her tunic and peplum. The girl was walking quickly, making the ruffles of her blue dress foam about her like waves at the feet of the sea-goddess Thetis, with an ease and alluring pride of which some great coquette might have been jealous. I often lost her amidst the crowds of passers-by; but the red flicker of her shawl guided me like gleams from a lighthouse, and I always found her once more.

My pursuit had commenced in Saint Mark's Square. Near the Paglia bridge, the lovely woman stopped to speak for a few moments with a swarthy old man, grey of beard and hair, a gondolier or fisherman, who seemed to be her father. The old man gave her some coins, and she plunged into one of those little alleys which lead to the Riva degli Schiavoni. After many a detour in the maze of alleys, *sottoportici* (*sub-porticoes*), canals, and bridges which so often lead the stranger astray in Venice, she stopped, no doubt to rid herself of the shadow that followed her at a respectful distance, in front of one of those open-air fish shops, where tuna is sold by the red slice; she haggled for a long time over a piece which she rejected. She started walking again, turning her head imperceptibly to look over her shoulder, casting a glance from the corner of her eye to see if she was free of the shadow's attentions. When she saw otherwise, she made a bad-tempered gesture which made her even more charming, and continued her journey through the streets, squares, alleyways, passages, and over bridges, in a manner that completely disoriented me. She led me thus, with agile and ever more hurried step, along the side of the Arsenal, through a deserted quarter, to a place where an unfinished church facade

rises, and there threw herself like a frightened deer against a door that opened and immediately closed again.

Among all the assumptions that the poor child might have made of my attentions, gallantry, assault, seduction, kidnapping, she surely could not have imagined that she was followed by a poetic art-lover who feasted his eyes on, and sought to engrave in his memory, like a beautiful verse or a beautiful picture, that charming neck he would never see again.

#### **Part XIV: A Vicar's Debut – Gondolas – Sunset**

Leaving the public gardens, one finds oneself on a former canal, filled-in and thereby transformed into a street. It presented the most lively of aspects; outside all the windows, and from all the balconies, hung pieces of damask, lengths of silk brocade, Persian carpets, or such rugs made from pieces coloured like a harlequin's outfit as they make in Venice, lacework-tablecloths, pieces of flamed silk; and from poorer houses curtains or bed-sheets: every facade offered its flag. One might have thought one was in France at Corpus Christi, at the time when the procession sets off, if the foreignness of the costumes and faces had not alerted one to the contrary; the windows framed groups of three or four girls, or young women in blue and white dresses, with brightly coloured shawls, their aspects lively and joyful, amicably clasped together, leaning over the street, and turning to reply to the young men standing behind them.

The street was crowded with fried-food booths, and sellers of watermelons, pumpkins, and grapes. The *acquaioli* (*water-sellers*) added a few drops of kirsch to the water which gave it the coldness of ice and an opal tint. The owners of improvised cafes poured out their brown fruit liqueurs; others sold crudely colourful ice-cream. The bar-restaurants were full of drinkers, celebrating the black wine of Italy and the yellow wine of Greece; an incredible crowd swarmed, in joyful tumult, amidst the narrow space.

The church in front of which we were passing allowed a view, through its open doors, of a conflagration of candles. The main altar dazzled, and, in this warm rosy atmosphere, thousands of lights twinkled like stars; the church was hung with damask laced with gold, and festooned with paper garlands, and the congregation was so large that it was impossible for us to take three steps beyond the threshold.

A tempest of music, basses, flutes and violins, was unleashed beneath the reddened vault, then the voices recommenced their chanting. A service accompanied by music is not uncommon in Venice; but this service was listened to with an attentiveness which is rarely a feature of Italian devotion, always a little sensual and distracted.

A parish priest was 'making his debut' as a curate or vicar, I know not which, and that was the reason for the celebration. Sonnets and odes in praise of his evangelical virtues and his Christian charity were plastered on all the walls: in Italy, everything is an opportunity for a sonnet; they are penned for marriages, births, birthdays, recoveries from illness, deaths; they shower them on opera divas; the sonnet is in Italy what the advertising poster is with us, an innocent and poetic version, above all a genuine one, a naive outpouring of the childish

admiration that the people of the South, more passionate than those of the North, feel the need to express with regard to everything. In these sonnets, there is a dreadful compounding of metaphors and conceits; stars shoot at all times, planets dance sarabands, and they make omelettes of suns and moons. Giambattista Marino's *L'Adone* is more often recalled than one thinks.

Walking along the Cà di Dio embankment to return to the Piazzetta, we saw some young men from the city, amateur oarsmen like our Parisian boatmen, who were launching their gondola at high speed against the bank of the quay, and, at the height of the action, halting the boat dead in its track, a few inches from the stone cladding. The practice is dangerous but graceful; seeing it travelling at speed, one thinks the boat will be smashed to a thousand pieces, but not so; they back water and start again. It is thus that Arab and Turkish horsemen urge their mounts, at the gallop, against a wall, then reign them in, still on all four legs, thereby achieving immobility, suddenly, after the violence of their approach. The Venetians of olden days were once able to watch these equestrian performances in the Atmeidan, the Hippodrome, of Constantinople, and adapted them to create something similar in their own homeland, where the horse is, so to speak, a chimerical being.

More than one young patrician still dons jacket, cap and traditional belt, and directs a gondola himself, with great ease. Foreigners also take to the practice, mainly the English, in their role as a nautical people. Many of them pay the gondola owners for the opportunity to practice the difficult art of navigating in Venetian style.

Every morning, a young man, with a most gentlemanly air, passed beneath our balcony, who was working on his oarsmanship with sweat and dedication; he was making visible progress, and by now must be worthy to be received into the Nicolotti or the Castellani clan; if he continues, he will perhaps be able to aspire to being baptised in sepia ink, which is still done, in secret, when it is a question of crowning a leader of one of these gondolier factions (*see George Sands: 'Lettres d'un Voyageur', Letter II*).

There's many a beautiful sunset in Paris. If one leaves the Tuileries via the Place de la Concorde and turns one's face towards the Champs-Élysées, it is difficult not to be stunned by the magnificent spectacle which presents itself: the trees en masse, the Egyptian obelisk, the magical perspective of the great avenue, the arch of the Arc de Triomphe open to the void, make an admirable frame for the sun which sinks in a splendour more dazzling to our eyes than that of the day gone by.

But there is a sight even more beautiful: sunset in Venice, as you come from the Lido, Quintavalle, or the public gardens.

The row of houses on the Giudecca punctuated by the dome of the Redentore; the Dogana with its square tower, surmounted by the twin statues of Hercules supporting that of Fortune; the two domes of Santa Maria della Salute, rounded like milk-filled breasts, all go to form a wonderfully varied outline, which is highlighted, strongly, against the sky, and provides the background to the picture.

The island of San Giorgio Maggiore, nearer to the eye, serves as a repoussoir, with its church, its dome and its brick bell-tower, a diminutive twin of the Campanile, which can be seen to the right, above the old Library and the Doge's Palace.

All these buildings bathed in shadow, since the light is behind them, reveal azure, lilac, and purple tones, on which are outlined in black the silhouettes of boats at anchor; above them a fiery splendour breaks forth, a firework-display of light rays; the sun sinks into masses of topazes, rubies, amethysts that the wind sets flowing at every instant, in the form of ever-changing cloud; dazzling rockets burst between the two domes of the Salute, and sometimes, depending on the point where one is placed, a Palladian spire intersects the sun's disk.

Without doubt, the scene is truly beautiful. But what doubles the enchantment of the spectacle is that it is echoed by the waters. The sun's preparation for rest, more magnificent than that of any king, has the lagoon for a mirror: all this light, these fiery rays, this phosphorescence, streams on the glittering waves, in prismatic trails of flame. It shines, it scintillates, it blazes, it flows as an ever-seething brightness. The bell-tower of San Giorgio Maggiore, draws, with its opaque shadow, stretching into the distance, a path of darkness through the watery conflagration, seeming to heighten itself disproportionately, and making it seem to possess a base in the depths of the abyss. The building's silhouette seems to swim between twin skies or twin seas. Is this the sky's reflection one sees in the water, or the water's reflection in the sky? The eye wavers, and everything is bathed in a general confusion of light.

The splendid spectacle reminded me of the passage from *El Mágico Prodigioso* by Calderon, where the poet, describing a sunset through the mouth of the student Cyprian (*See Act I, lines 77-78*), depicts the clouds and the waves that grant:

*Al gran cadáver del día,  
Son monumento de plata:*

*To the grand corpse of day,  
His tomb of silver.*

But let me leave a scene, so impossible to describe, regretful that Félix Ziem, who has painted so pretty a sunrise in azure, argent and rose-pink, from the Piazzetta, was not given to adding, as a pendant, a sunset painted from San Servolo, or the Riva dei Schiavoni; which would have freed me from attempting a depiction.

We disembarked at the Piazzetta landing-stage, which was crowded with a riot of gondolas, and headed towards the Piazza through the arcades of Sansovino's old Library, today the Viceroy's Palace. Let me note, in passing, a characteristic detail: in the places where we would, sensibly, place a Rambuteau Column (*public urinal*) at home, one finds a large black cross bearing the word, *rispetto*, a recommendation which is less than piously observed. It is a

singular use of the mark of our redemption, to use it to protect dubious corners. Is there not some pagan reminiscence here, a translation, in the Italian manner, of Virgil's lines:

..... *'procul, o procul este, profani,'*  
*conclamat vates, 'totoque absistite luco;'*

..... *'Away, stand far away, O you, profane ones,'*  
*the priestess cried, 'absent yourselves from all this grove;'*

*(Aeneid, Book VI:258-29)*

I ask forgiveness of my readers, and especially my female readers, for my somewhat coarse remark, but it is an aspect of manners that one can and should note. It portrays Italy more vividly perhaps than some generalised grand dissertation.

It is on the Piazza, at around eight o'clock in the evening, that life in Venice reaches its maximum intensity. One can imagine nothing more cheerful, more lively, more amusing. The setting sun shines, a brightest pink, on the facade of Saint Mark's, which seems to blush with pleasure and sparkle ardently in these last rays. A few late pigeons return to the gable or cornice where they must sleep, till morning, their heads under their wing.

The Piazza is lined with cafes, like the Palais-Royal in Paris, with which it shares more than one resemblance; the most famous of all is Caffè Florian, a rendezvous for the aristocracy. Then there are the Caffès Sutil, Quadri, and Costanza frequented by the Greeks, and the Imperatore d'Austria, where the Germans and Levantines meet.

These cafes possess nothing remarkable by way of ornamentation, especially when compared to the superb establishments, overburdened with gilding, paintings, and mirrors, of this type, in Paris: they consist of a few very simple rooms, with quite low ceilings, where one never sits, unless it be on the worst of wintry days; the only characteristic decoration to be noted, are some panels of filigreed coloured glass in the windowed interior doors of Caffè Florian.

The former proprietor of the cafe Florian was well-regarded by the old Venetian nobility, for whom he executed all manner of small unofficial services. He was also a friend of Canova, who modelled the feet of this coffee-shop owner afflicted by gout, so that his shoemaker could make him shoes guaranteed not to trouble him. This evidence of good nature on the part of the illustrious artist, for whom the beautiful Pauline Borghèse did not disdain to pose naked, is most touching.

The coffee is excellent in Venice, as I have said; it is served on leather trays, accompanied by a glass whose tasting occupies the entire leisure hours of the Venetians. The ices and granitas are unremarkable except for their low price; they are far from the exquisite refinements of

Spanish iced drinks. I found none of note other than a certain grape or verjuice sorbet, very cool, and very tasty.

Customers settle beneath the arches, or in the Piazza itself, where chairs, wooden benches and tables are installed in front of each café. Formerly, striped tents and awnings were erected in the middle of the square to attractive effect; this picturesque custom has disappeared. Colourful blinds are also starting to become rare; they are far too often replaced by ugly pieces of blue canvas, like cooks' aprons. They are less conspicuous, and in better taste, say the civilised.

Flower-girls, charming, and streetwise, but nonetheless fiercely virtuous, if one is to believe the tales told of Englishmen, distraught with love, dropping handfuls of banknotes into their baskets without the slightest success, flit around the square and regale the passers-by, and the buyers of their attractive wares: if one refuses them, they give one a little bouquet, with a smile, and run off. It is not customary to pay them on the spot, that would be a gross error; rather, from time to time, one offers them a silver coin as a gift and for good luck.

The flower-sellers give way to sellers of glazed fruit, who walk about shouting: 'Caramel! Caramel!' in a deafening manner; their store is a basket containing grapes, figs, pears, and plums, coated with a shiny glaze of candied sugar.

One of them, a little lad of twelve years old or so, amused us by the prodigious volubility with which he uttered his cry. We gave him a few coins, and he always stopped to chat with us; his relations with foreigners from all countries had made him something of a polyglot, and he knew at least a few words of every idiom. This Parisian gamin on the streets of Venice possessed aptitude and intelligence. It even appeared that the viceroy had granted a small pension for his education; but the young caramel-seller had compromised himself, during Daniele Manin's presidency, since he had been a republican drummer, and his heroic prowess had now resulted in the loss of his position as a state rentier. One evening, a dandy to whom he offered his merchandise with excessive importunity perhaps, dealt him a terrible blow with his cane on his poor skinny little shoulder; he said nothing and shed not a tear, but gave the brute a look which meant 'Good for a stabbing a few years from now.' I hoped the account might be settled, along with that of the cruel *Loredano* (see *Byron's play and Verdi's opera 'I Due Foscari'*). Urged on by quite natural indignation, I had already lifted a stool to split the skull of this wretched man in his Sunday best. A respect for human life, which I later reproached myself for yielding to, stopped me. I backed away from starting a tumultuous quarrel in a language unfamiliar to me.

We also had as friends a collection of little beggar-children, boys and girls, very blonde and dishevelled, and very pink under their dirt and tan, who only needed a few buckets of water poured over them to set them afloat in the seas, above, of a Veronese sky. One of them had trousers made of selvedges sewn together, which produced the most singular variegation. On one of these strips of fabric one could read the words 'Broadcloth from Elbeuf' in yellow letters on a blue background. This harlequin's costume made up of trimmings was the most picaresque garment in the world.

We sometimes gave a little girl, of ten or so, and the most sensible of the little band, a *zwanzig* (an Austrian twenty-kreuzter coin), on the condition that she shared it with the others; and it was amusing to see her seeking smaller coins from the money-changer so as to distribute it, or the little scamps finding change from among their rags to achieve their share.

## Part XV: The Venetians – William Tell – Girolamo

If any in the world are lazy, and lost to the pleasures of idleness, it is Venetian ladies of the upper class. Use of the gondola has disaccustomed them to walking. They scarcely know how to take a single step. In order for them to venture outside, a conjuncture of rare atmospheric circumstances is required, even in their beautiful and gentle climate. The sirocco, the sun, a cloud that threatens rain, a sea breeze that is too fresh, each is sufficient reason to keep them at home; every tiny thing floors them, and tires them, and their greatest exercise is staggering from their couch to the balcony to smell one of those expansive flowers which flourish so well in the warm and humid air of Venice. This nonchalant, retired life gives them a pure, matt whiteness, an incredible delicacy of complexion.

When it happens to be one of those privileged times that we call, at home, ‘weather for young ladies’, some of them make two or three rounds of Saint Mark’s Square, at the hour when the military band gives its evening performance, and then take a long rest in front of Caffè Florian, in front of a glass of water turned opal by a drop of anise, in the company of their husbands or brothers, or their *cavaliere serventes* (admirers); but this is rare, especially in the canicular days (*the dog-days*) during which wealthy or patrician families take refuge on the mainland in their villas on the banks of the Brenta, or on their estates in Friuli, because of the exhalations from the lagoons, which are said to be unhealthy and cause fevers.

Formerly, Levantines abounded in Venice; their fur coats, dolmans, their ample clothes in bright colours, made a varying and picturesque crowd scene, amidst which they moved in a grave and impassive manner. They are rarer now trade has moved elsewhere, and is routed via Trieste; but one frequently encounters Greeks who, with caps adorned with a large silk tassel, a kind of bluish pendant reaching the shoulder, shaven temples, and hair flowing down behind, display that characteristic appearance, that beautiful national clothing, which contrasts so with hideous modern dress. These Greeks, who are mostly only merchants or owners of boats from Zante, Corfu, Cyprus or Syros, have a singularly majestic look, and the nobility of their ancient race is written on their features as in a Golden Book; they stand, in groups of three or four, at the corner of the Piazza, before the Caffè Costanza, which enjoys a monopoly by way of offering mocha and pipes to these children of the Levant.

Around the cafes strolling musicians circulate, performing snatches of opera, the tenors among them singing *Lucia* or some other tune of Donizetti’s with that smooth tone and admirable Italian ease, by means of which instinct mimics talent despite its errors. Chinese shadow-plays, different from ours, in that the background scene is black while the figures are white, unfold quickly, housed in a canvas frame. The performer, a droll fellow dressed in an ancient tailcoat, and wearing a sort of horned hat like the marquis whom everyone will recall

having seen running about the streets of Paris shaking his tow wig and scraping a badly-tuned violin, explains that he was formerly an Opera impresario; but that, as a result of the high cost of employing tenors, and the capricious moods of prima donnas, he has been reduced, thus, to poverty and only manages Chinese shadow-puppets, an inexpensive and docile company if ever there was one.

But a group forms in the middle of the square; attention wanders from the melodious tenors, the Chinese-shadows find their circle of spectators broken; the caramel-sellers cease their monotonous cries; all the café chairs perform a quarter-turn: everything falls silent.

Music-stands are set out, scores are placed on them; the military band arrives, tunes up, and begins. They play the overture to Rossini's *Guillaume Tell*.

Just as the Italians possess an instinct for vocal music, so the Germans possess an instinct for instrumental; the overture was executed with precision, in admirable ensemble; however, it lacked the energy, the enthusiasm, the wild ardour that this revolutionary piece imperiously demands. All that summons up love, the delights of pastoral life, the mountain snows, emerald meadows, and azure lakes, the sounds of bells, the fresh alpine scents, was expressed with profound and poetic feeling; but the accents of rebellion and freedom, the indignation of a proud spirit oppressed by tyranny, all the seething tumultuous aspect of the work, was rendered in a soft, timid, evasive manner, as if a mysterious censorship had commanded effeminate harmony to extinguish those bugle-calls, that hiss of arrows, that dull rumbling of a people shaking off their chains.

The music seemed designed to stop the Venetians from thinking that Gessler's cap, a sign of Austrian domination before whom they must bow their heads, was forever to be flying from the masthead. The three masts of Saint Mark's, with their yellow and black banners, were there to ease rapprochement, while the overture if played with greater vigour might have given people the idea of overthrowing the badge of tyranny.

Once the overture is over, the crowd slowly withdraws. Only the odd pedestrian remains, and the *birichini*, a band of ruffians, whose most honest trade is the sale of contraband cigars, and who pursue one with dubious proposals, because, while one still reads, in the accounts of modern travellers, that Venice turns night into day, it is no less true that at midnight the Piazza is deserted, and certainly lonelier than the Boulevard de Gand (*Boulevard des Italiens*) in Paris, at the same hour; which will not prevent tourists, relying on ancient guidebooks that refer to customs discontinued since the fall of the Republic, repeating, for fifty years longer, that the Piazza San Marco teems with people till dawn.

That was once true, when the apartments which rise above the arches of the Old and New Procuracies were alive with players of Faro, masquerade balls (*redoutes*), and gambling tables, where all the nocturnal world of nobles, knights of industry, and courtesans, indulged in a perpetual carnival lacking nothing, not even its masks, that world of which Giacomo Casanova de Seingalt left such a curious description in his *Memoirs*.

The offices of commercial brokers; the boutiques where Murano glassware, necklaces of shell and coral, and model gondolas are sold; the shops full of prints, maps, and views of Venice

for the use of tourists, close one after the other, till only the cafes and tobacco-sellers remain open.

It was time to reboard our gondola, which was waiting for us at the Piazzetta landing stage, near the Duchess of Berry's lantern. The moon had risen, and nothing is more pleasant than to travel, by moonlight, along the Grand canal, or the Giudecca. It is a romantic pleasure which an enthusiastic traveller of the kind specified by Hoffmann is scarcely permitted to deprive himself on a beautiful, clear August night (*Note the Barcarolle from Offenbach's opera 'The Tales of Hoffman'*). We had yet another reason to wander the lagoon, at an hour when it would have been wiser to go and wrap ourselves in our mosquito net. Who has not heard of gondoliers, who sing verses of Tasso and barcarolles in that Venetian patois so stuttering and lisping that it seems a childish babble? It is one of those commonplaces of travel that it is more polite to reject than accept. The gondoliers have not sung so for a long time. However, the tradition is not yet lost; the older boatmen retain, deep in their memories, some episode of Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*, which they ask nothing better than to recall for a good tip, and a few glasses of Cyprus wine. Like the girls of Ischia, who only don their beautiful Greek costumes for the English, the gondoliers, wisely, only deploy their melodies to an accompaniment of guineas.

*And when, in the evening, a melancholy song,  
Like the lovely warbling of an ancient flute,  
Seizes your soul, and lifts you to the heavens,  
You imagine that song, that melodious tune,  
To be the naive thought of a plaintive soul,  
Who cannot, by day, in the daunting city,  
Pour out his flood of complaints at leisure,  
Yet abandons himself, now, to secret music,  
To the sweet air, the beauty of the night,  
And lingering, oar in hand, consoles himself.  
So, tilting your head to listen more closely,  
You gaze at the waves which bear the song;  
And the gondola passes, amidst dark waters,  
Its torch gleams and dies, deep in the lagoon;  
And you, still turned towards the point of light,  
Your heart still filled with that sweet song,  
Whose notes still float on the passing wave,  
Ask aloud what is that perfect harmony,*

*And towards what far shore the music flees.  
 Then some passer-by replies to you sadly:  
 'They are dwellers in Europe's chilly climes,  
 Pale strangers ever cloaked there in mist,  
 Unloved at home, who travelled here to see  
 If Venice sings still o'er the evening wave;  
 And heartless, like those devoid of family,  
 Have bought the body of some humble beauty,  
 And, for a few coins, complete their pleasure,  
 By having their gondolier sing Tasso's lines.'*

Despite this fine poetry from Auguste Barbier's pen, and though we might pass in the eyes of that bilious poet for '*pale strangers ever cloaked there in mist*' we did not hesitate to give old Girolamo '*a few coins*', prompted by Antonio, so that the former might play for us, twixt sky and water, a picturesque musical comedy, of which we asked nothing more than to be fooled, ready to abandon ourselves to the enchantment we ourselves had prepared. One might add, as an extenuating circumstance, that we had bought no one's body, and were reclining there, in chaste solitude, on the ancient Persian carpet of our gondola.

Girolamo was a droll fellow bronzed by the sun, and cured by the sea and the many libations he allowed himself to maintain the suppleness of his throat; possessing a 'salty' singing voice, he was obliged, he said, to drink a lot; each stanza had on him, as on a Rabelaisian singer, the same effect as smoked ham, caviar or *bottarga* (*salted mullet roe*).

Once we were a little offshore, in the vast channel of the Giudecca, which is almost an arm of the sea, and near, roughly, to the Jesuit church (*I Gesuati*), whose white façade was silvered by the moon, Girolamo, having lubricated the bronchi with a large swig of liquor, sang for us, in a guttural voice, which was somewhat deep and hoarse, but which spread far over the water, adorned with portamentos and prolonged cadences in the manner of Tyrolean singers: *La Biondina in Gondoletta* (*Anton Lamberti*), *Pronta la Gondoletta* (*Luigi and Federico Ricci*), and the episode of *Erminia among the Shepherds* (*Tasso, Gerusalemme Liberata*).

The first of these barcarolles is charming; Rossini has not disdained to place one or two verses amidst the singing-lesson in his *Barber of Seville*; its tune and lyrics make it almost a model of the genre; the others are little more than variations on the theme. It would be difficult, if not to say impossible, to translate into formal language all the delights and charming diminutives of the Venetian dialect. The song is all about a romantic trip on the water.

A pretty blonde,' as the song has it, takes a gondola, and the poor thing is pleased to fall asleep in the boat, on the arm of the gondolier, who wakes her from time to time; but the boat's rocking soon makes the lovely child fall asleep once more. The moon is half hidden in the clouds, the water is calm, the wind has dropped; a little breeze merely fans the beauty's hair,

and lifts the veil that covers her breast. While gazing, in contemplation, at the perfections of his lovely fare, her rounded face, her charming mouth and figure, the gondolier feels his heart stir, a commotion within, a kind of attraction he cannot describe; he respects her sleep, and at first leaves her undisturbed the while, though love tempts him and counsels him to wake her. Then slowly, and gently, he lets himself slip lower, to lie next to this beautiful blonde on the floor of the boat; but who can find rest with a raging fire as his neighbour? In the end, tired of her endless slumber, he *takes advantage of the situation*, and certainly fails to repent of it. ‘Oh, Heavens!’ he exclaims, in his naive foolishness, ‘What beautiful things she said, and I have done! No, never in my life have I been so happy.’

We made the mistake of taking our singer along with us, instead of placing him in a distant boat or listening to his singing from the shore, since the music is more pleasant when heard from far away than close by; but being more poet than musician, I wished to hear the words.

While singing Tasso’s octosyllables, Girolamo took a breath mid-verse, and ended with a kind of bizarre trill, doubtless intended to support and carry the rhyme. From a distance, this harsh and strongly accentuated mode of performance sounds harmonious, and by its very singularity gives you more pleasure than an opera aria sung by Mario (*Giovanni de Candia*), or by Giovanni Rubini. There are moments of silence, of obscure languor, where the spirit seems to wait for a melody to spring from the depths of all this calm, and the first human utterance that rises from the bosom of the waters, the slightest piano chord that filters through the apertures of a balcony, are welcomed like a benefaction.

While performing his repertoire, Girolamo had granted the bottle such frequent attention, that we were obliged to return and refuel, at a wine-shop on the Fondamente delle Zattere. His liquor renewed, his vivacity returned.

His cheerfulness having increased, after swallowing half a jug of Valpolicella, he began to imitate the noise ducks make when, surprised in the marshes, they fly away, skimming the water and uttering those quack-quack noises that Aristophanes would not have hesitated to translate into an onomatopoeic chorus in another mad comedy of birds or frogs.

To tell the truth, it was the finest piece in his repertoire; he was making a jest of it all, and Antonio let his oar drift, and laughed till he burst into tears. Girolamo seemed very proud of this talent and valued it more than all the rest. He also imitated the whistling of cannonballs, which he had taken the opportunity to study from life, during the siege. As he simulated, with his mouth, the trajectory of the projectiles and their descent into the water, his eyes gleamed noticeably, and he straightened with a certain pride. Though he said not a word regarding those martial events, for a Venetian never abandons prudence, it was not difficult to understand that he had taken an active part in them, and had more than once carried powder and ammunition in his gondola while under fire from the batteries. He must have seen more than one of the cannonballs, that he imitated so well, fall close to him.

Moreover, the government has not sought to remain silent regarding the facts. Quite a few official posters relating to the siege of Venice line the arcades of the Procuracies. There is even a sort of diorama which presents the main events of the attack and defence. This degree of tolerance surprised me quite a bit, I admit; but it is a manifestation of a political deceit which

seeks to show Austrian domination as gentler than the absolute regime of the Papal States and the Kingdom of Naples.

If one knows nothing of Venice, and has read in the newspapers the story of its long and heroic defence, one expects to find the city ravaged, crushed by cannonballs, filled with piles of rubble and collapsed roofs. Apart from a few stones dislodged from the Palazzo Labia, and some marks from projectiles on the dome and facade of San Geremia at the end of the Grand Canal, one would think nothing had occurred.

To see the effects of the siege, you have to go about the islands, round the forts and outworks that protect a city rendered almost impregnable by its location among the vast shallow lagoons which prevent the approach of heavy artillery. The Austrians deployed aerial bombs; but the wind made them deviate, or they rose too high, burst in the air, and harmed no one; these stray balloon-bombs had even become an object of amusement for the population, who watched them explode in the sky like fireworks.

Venice, from before which Attila retreated, remained untouched by invasion for fourteen hundred years; and until 1797 it retained the status of a republic. Struck by that senile terror which precipitates obsolescent states to their ruin, the city surrendered, without a fight, to a conqueror who, more appreciative of its defensive resources and location, thought it could not be taken, and was about to pass by. Since then, no Doge has mounted the Bucentaur (*his ceremonial barge*) to celebrate Venice's marriage with the sea. The Adriatic no longer wears, on its azure finger, the gold ring of a wife, and the eagle of Austria tears with its hooked beak at the flanks of Saint Mark's winged lion.

But let us set these political considerations aside, which arose from our contemplation of the scene, and return to the Campo San Moisè.

The main thing, before going to bed, is to hunt down the *zanzares*, atrocious mosquitoes which particularly torment foreigners, at whom they hurl themselves with the pleasure a gourmet takes in savouring an exotic and intriguing dish. At the grocers and pharmacists, they sell a fumigatory powder that one burns on the stove, with all the windows closed, and which drives out, or suffocates, these dreadful insects. I believe this powder to be as unpleasant to human beings as to their cousins, and many lumps on hands and face bear witness every morning to the ineffectiveness of the remedy. The wiser thing is not to place a light near one's bed, and to wrap oneself tightly in the mosquito-net's gauze. Fortunately, our skin was accustomed to the south, scorched by the wind, and tanned by travel, thereby repelling the piercing and sucking of these nocturnal blood-drinkers; but there are people with more delicate skin, whom they subject to real torture. The skin turns red, becomes covered with pustules; the face swells from these venomous bites, which cause unbearable itching that neither scratching nor ointment can soothe. We have seen that, for some, a fever follows the hellish hours of darkness; it suffices, in order to be obliged to lie awake all night, to shut one of these buzzing monsters inside the net with you; but we were already acclimatised.

Much has been said regarding how silent Venice is; but you must find accommodation elsewhere than close to a landing-stage to find the statement true. Beneath our window we heard whispers, laughter, outbursts of voices, songs, a perpetual commotion that never ceased

till two in the morning. At night, the gondoliers, who sleep during the day while awaiting customers, are as lively as cats, and hold their meetings, which are scarcely less noisy, beneath the arch of some bridge or on the steps of some landing stage. We possessed both landing-stage and bridge. Seated on a marble step, or the stern of their gondola, they eat seafood, and drink Friuli wine, supping happily by the light of the stars and the little lamps illuminating the Madonnas in their niches at street corners. Some of their friends, voluptuous vagabonds, who have church porches for alcoves, and large stone slabs, heated by the day's sunlight, for mattresses come to join them and enhance the Sabbath. Add a few pretty maidservants, freed by their mistresses' slumber to seek out some strapping brown-skinned fellow in his Chioggiotto cap, and Persian canvas-jacket, bearing on his chest more amulets than an Amerindian's wampum or glass-beads, and whose contralto voices, squealing or strident in turn, spread in inexhaustible babbling waves, with that particular sonority of the southern idiom, and you will possess a succinct idea of the silence of Venice, at night.

## XVI to XX - The Accademia

### Contents

Part XVI: The Arsenale di Venezia – Fusina.....	116
Part XVII: The Accademia di Belle Arti .....	126
Part XVIII: The Accademia continued .....	131
Part XIX: The Accademia further continued .....	136
Part XX: The Streets – The Austrian Emperor’s Birthday Celebrations .....	142

### Part XVI: The Arsenale di Venezia – Fusina



*Venice - View from the Island of St. George*

The weather was fine and, seeing the sky so pleasing, we fancied taking our lunch at the Free Port, on the island of San Giorgio Maggiore, and visiting, at the same time, its beautiful Palladian church, whose red bell-tower rises to such good effect midst the lagoon. The facade was retouched a little by Vincenzo Scamozzi; the interior contains, in addition to the obligatory complement of vast paintings by Tintoretto, that robust workman who painted acres of masterpieces, and various Greek marble columns, gilded altars, and statues in stone and bronze, an admirable choir of carved wood, representing various scenes in the life of Saint Benedict, and recalling Alonso Berruguete's wonderful wood sculptures, in the cathedrals of Spain. This fine work was created, with delightful artistry and incredible patience, by Albert van den Brulle, one of those talented artists who pass unknown amidst the superfetation of geniuses produced by preceding centuries, the sheer number of whom exceeds the capacity of human memory. A charming bronze statuette, set on the chancel balustrade, on the right as one enters through the porch, and representing Saint George, offers the unique feature of bearing the closest of likenesses to Lord Byron. This portrait I found striking, in its anticipatory and, so to speak, prophetic appearance. Moreover, one could not witness anything more elegant, more disdainfully aristocratic, more English in a word, than that head of a Greek saint, lips contracted in the *mocking* manner of the author of *Don Juan*.

I know not whether the noble lord, who spent much time in Venice and who must necessarily have visited the church of San Giorgio Maggiore, noticed this unique resemblance, which doubtless, would have left him feeling flattered.

Behind the church, on the tip of the island facing the Piazzetta, where the Austrians have established a cannon-battery, are the warehouses and basins of the Free Port. One traverses, after navigating the gate guarded by customs officers, various courtyards surrounded by tallish arcades, and filled with neglected growth, and arrives at a sort of restaurant and *osteria*, a meeting-place for sailors and gondoliers, who savour the pleasure of drinking duty-free wine there, much as the workmen in Paris exit the barriers to get drunk.



*Venice - The Piazzetta of St. Mark, with a view of the Island of St. George*

The restaurant is always crowded with people, and customers are spread about, outside, on benches around wooden tables, the shadow of the church serving as an awning. Rascals, pushing wheelbarrows loaded with bales, circulate among the drinkers, whom they ogle with an envious air, and beside whom they will go and sit, once they have earned the few pence necessary for these frugal orgies.

Opposite the restaurant, a large empty store, arched and whitewashed like a blockhouse, complete with window-grilles, overlooks a deserted alley, and serves as a refuge for folk whom the somewhat turbulent gaiety of the outside world might weary, and for amorous couples seeking solitude.

They serve Adriatic red mullet (*triglie*), so appetizing, so ruddy, of so fresh and vivacious a hue, that one would eat them just for the pleasure of their colour, were they not, as in fact they are, the best in the world; peaches, grapes, a glass of Cypriot wine, and coffee, make a lunch of exquisite simplicity, and, if chance sets one's hand on a good Havana cigar, which one smokes lying in one's gondola while returning to the Riva degli Schiavoni, I see little to detract from one's happiness, as long as one has received good news, in letters from France, the previous day.

It was early, and, before visiting Fusina, we had time to visit the Arsenal, though not the interior, since access from mere curiosity is now forbidden; but what interested us more than seeing beams, guns, and ships under construction, was the chance to admire the lions of Piraeus, trophies seized by Doge Francesco Morosini in the Peloponnese, during the Great Turkish War.

These two colossi, in Pentelic marble, are devoid of the zoological truth that Antoine-Louis Barye would, doubtless, have given them; but they have something so proud, so grandiose, so divine, if this word can be applied to animals, that they produce a deep impression. Their golden whiteness stands out admirably against the red facade of the Arsenal, composed of a portico populated by statues of some merit, however, the deserted neighbourhood makes them appear like dolls, and their two turrets of red bricks crenelated and bordered with stone, like the houses of the Place Royale, in Paris. Trophies gained from a defeat, yet still retaining their proud, haughty countenance, these lions have the air of retaining, in the city of Saint Mark, a memory of the ancient goddess Cybele; and the great Goethe celebrated them with an epigram that I translate here, asking forgiveness for substituting my weak verse for the Olympian lines of that Jupiter of Weimar:

*Two ancient Greek lions stand quiet at the Arsenale;  
Seeming small next to the gates, tower, and canal.  
If Cybele came down, they would nestle together  
Before her, happy to draw her chariot once more.  
But now they rest there sadly; a new winged tomcat  
Purrs everywhere, and Venice calls him her Patron.*

*(Goethe: Venetian Epigrams, XX)*

The Arsenal, with its immense basins, and its covered dry-dock, by means of which, it is said, a galley could be built, rigged, equipped, and launched in a day, reminded me, in its dreary abandonment, of that of Cartagena in Spain, so active at the time of the ‘invincible’ Armada. It was from here that the fleets departed, en route to conquer Corfu, Zante, Cyprus, Athens, and all the rich and beautiful islands of the Archipelago; but then Venice was Venice, and the lion of Saint Mark, now gloomy and defamed, possessed the nails and teeth of the fiercest heraldic monsters, and, despite Goethe’s epigram, made a superb and triumphant figure on her coats of arms.

Our excursion to Fusina required two oarsmen; Antonio’s companion joined him. We even carried a sail to gain help from the wind which was favourable.

We passed between San Giorgio and the tip of the Giudecca, the side of which we skirted, grazing past its courtyards and gardens full of vines and fruit trees, and entered the lagoon proper.

The sky was perfectly clear, and the light so bright, that the water shone like a sheet of silver and it was impossible to distinguish the edge of the horizon out to sea. The islands appeared like small brown patches, and the distant boats seemed to be sailing through the sky. It really took all one's reasoning powers to convince oneself they were not floating on air. The eye alone was certainly deceived. The railway viaduct, a gigantic work of engineering that joins Venice to the mainland, and which we could see from afar, on our right, offered the singular effect of a mirage. Its numerous arches, mirrored by blue and calm water of a clarity like that of purest ice, together with their reflections, formed perfect circles, and looked like those strange completely-round Chinese doors, which one sees on Oriental screens; such that the architectural fantasies of Beijing seemed to have influenced this chimerical arcade in the city of the Doges, the city whose silhouette, adorned with numerous bell-towers, and dominated by the Campanile surmounted by its golden angel, presented its flank to the view, in an unexpected and picturesque way.

After passing a fortified islet, having at its tip a charming statue of a Madonna, and a very ugly Austrian sentry, we followed one of those canals traced in the lagoon by a double row of piles, which indicate passages where the water is sufficiently deep; for the lagoon is a kind of salt-marsh, where the flow and the reflux prevent stagnation, but whose depth of water is scarcely more than three or four feet, except in certain places scoured by nature or by humankind, which the posts we have spoken of designate. A few of these posts bear on their summit miniature chapels, crude diptychs fashioned, out of piety, by sailors, which hold images and statuettes of the Madonna. The gracious protector whom the litany calls Stella Maris, the Star of the Sea, is there in the midst of her element. These Madonnas of the waters are somewhat touching. No doubt the divine one is present everywhere, and her protection descends from heaven as quickly as it rises from the sea, but this pious credulity seeking more immediate help, the protectress being present in the midst of peril, has about it something childish, charming, and poetic. I love these Venetian Madonnas eroded by the salty air, and grazed by the wings of passing gulls, and willingly address to them an *Ave, María, grátia plena*.

The blue line of the Euganean Hills was emerging, vaguely, before us against the soft blue of the sky, more like a vein of darker azure than a terrestrial reality. The trees and houses on the shore, which we could already see, appeared, because of the sloping surface of the water, to be plunged knee-deep in the sea, while the red bell-towers of the islets, diminutive versions of the Campanile, which has the air of a hereditary ruler over its generations of offspring, seemed to rise, in their immediacy, from the flow like great stems of coral. Low ground, covered with a jumble of vegetation, lay before us. We leapt from the gondola. We had arrived at Fusina.

It is at Fusina that the Brenta canals end, from which Venice obtained its water supply before the artesian wells drilled by Joseph Degousée furnished her, by rare good luck, with an abundant flow, to fill the cisterns with clear, limpid, sometimes gaseous water, a glass of which I drank near the convent of the Capuchin fathers (*Convento dei Padri Cappuccini*), on the Giudecca.

The ravages of war, at Fusina, have not yet been repaired, its houses gutted by cannonballs, ruined by the bombing, luxuriant vegetation staining their shattered walls, white as forgotten

bones on a battlefield. A small rustic chapel remains intact, respected by the opposing parties or, as God's dwelling place, restored more swiftly than those of humankind.

The fertile, humid soil, impregnated with sea salt, thickened by plant detritus, heated by the invigorating sun, allows a whole flora of those charming plants that we call weeds because they are free to flourish in uncultivated abandonment and solitude. In short it is like a virgin forest; barbed spikes of wild oats sway at the edge of ditches; hemlocks agitate their greenish-white umbels above banks of nettles; wild mallows display their curly leaves and pale pink flowers; bindweeds hang silvery bells from the arms of brambles; in the midst of grass up to one's knees, a thousand nameless flowers sparkle and glitter, flakes of gold, azure, purple scattered there by the great colourist to vary a too-uniform shade of green. On the banks of the canals, water lilies deploy their large viscous plates, and raise their yellow blooms; arrowheads of *sagittaria* tremble in the wind; loosestrife, with willowy leaves, extends its purple flowers; irises brandish their glaucous daggers; ribboned reeds, and flowering rushes clump together in dense, picturesque disorder. Elderberries, hazelnut bushes, shrubs and trees that no one prunes, cast their shadows riddled with sunlight over that tangled lushness.

Lizards, lively, alert, twitching their tails, traverse, like arrows, the narrow paths where tree-frogs lurk in ruts full of rainwater. Choirs of frogs, with a simultaneous leap, plunge, as you pass, beneath the grasses of the Brenta. As we followed the canal, a beautiful water-snake delivered herself without fear to the most graceful evolutions. She swam quickly, head held high, undulating her supple body; a flash of sapphire crossing the silvery water, she seemed a queen at play in her domain, quite untroubled by our presence. She barely cast a distracted glance of her jewelled eyes towards us, a glance that said: 'Why is this intruder here' It was the first time in my life that a reptile seemed pretty. Perhaps that charming snake was descended from the line of the sinuous serpent that seduced Eve with its graceful coils, the brilliance of its colouring, and the eloquence of its speech. As we returned, we found her in the same place, parading like a coquette and, like some *Célimène* (*see Molière's play 'Le Misanthrope'*) of the canal-bank, seeking to garner a look, or what is more likely, attract a shy lover hiding beneath the watercress, or among the reeds.

Locks and dams, accidentally providing picturesque motifs, retain the waters far and near. Light arches of brick, which serve both as buttresses and bridges, frequently cross the canal, but all half-ruined and tottering, overgrown with vegetation which replaces the stones or bricks that fall, already well-nigh overtaken by Nature, so swift to erase the works of humankind, enduring rather than accepting them. This dereliction is regrettable from the point of view of the engineer, but not at all so for the poet and the artist; if moss eats at the cladding, if climbing plants split the walls, if rushes end up blocking the canal, it suits the scene perfectly.

This uncultivated corner of Fusina delighted me in the extreme, and lodged in my mind far more clearly than places that merited it more. Closing my eyes, I can see yet, in memory's darkened room, though a year already separates me from the scene, the veins of leaves, the shadows the trees cast on the path, the honey-bees buzzing in the mallow-flowers; a thousand small insignificant details, perfectly sharp and clear.

Probably the pleasant effect of this freshness and solitude was due to our few weeks stay in Venice, where one sees, as I have already said, only marble, sky, and water. Tired, perhaps

without realising it, of gliding along in a gondola on the canals, or on foot over the polished slabs of Saint Mark's Square, we experienced a secret joy in treading the naked breast of Cybele's mother. Saturated with art, statues, paintings, palaces, drunk on the genius of mankind, we were brought, by a reaction in Nature's favour, to find this piece of land abandoned to the luxuriance of wild vegetation a delight; we who respect life to the extent of not picking a flower, gathered masses of foliage and huge bouquets to carry back to the Campo San Moisè.

On our return, the gondolier transported us through streets of water that as yet we did not know. Decaying cities are like dying bodies: life, retreating towards the heart, gradually abandons the extremities; the streets become depopulated, neighbourhoods become deserted, the blood no longer has the strength to reach the furthest ends of the veins. The entrance to Venice, as one arrives from Fusina, is heartbreaking in its melancholy. A few rare boats, bringing supplies from the mainland, glide silently over the sleeping water, beside stretches of deserted houses. Palaces, charming in their architecture, lack window-frames, and the gaps are closed, roughly, by boards nailed crosswise; the plaster of these abandoned homes is peeling; moss spreads its green carpets over the lower levels, the water-steps are encrusted with shells and marine plants, stairs which crabs alone climb these days.

From the windows of the odd inhabited house hang rags and tatters of drying linen, sole indications of life given by the families that have taken refuge within. Here and there a magnificently worked grille, a balcony with complex foliage, a crude coat of arms, marble columnettes, a carved mask, a cornice bearing sculptures above a cracked, blackened wall, gullied by rain, eroded through neglect, reveals an ancient splendour, the palazzo of some patrician family that died out, or fell into poverty.

As one progresses, this unfortunate impression dissipates, life, little by little, is reborn, and one finds oneself, with pleasure, amidst the animation of the grand canal or Saint Mark's square.

Time had seemed to fly at Fusina; it was already the hour for dinner. The crabs, which swarm in the canals, began to raise their hideous bodies, and curved pincers, above the line drawn by the water at the feet of the houses, a manoeuvre they perform every day, at six in the evening, with the punctuality of a stopwatch.

We dined that evening in Campo San Gallo, a square located behind the Piazza, at a German *gasthof*, where we forewent the *vini nostrani*, black as blackberry juice, in favour of a mug of Munich beer.

We partook of our refreshment there in the open air, under an awning striped with white and saffron bands, side by side with French painters, German artists, and Austrian officers, the latter short, blond, thin young men, well-corseted in their elegant uniforms, most polite, very well-bred, with the physiognomy of young *Werther* (see *Goethe's famous epistolary novel*), and eschewing soldierly manners; the conversation was generally of an aesthetic nature, interrupted now and then by one of those complicated and laborious pleasantries, remembered from Jena, Bonn or Heidelberg; the tilted cap of the student reappearing beneath the soldier's shako.

In the midst of the square stood a cistern-head, where the women of the neighbourhood and the Styrian water-carriers came to draw water at certain times; at the end of the square, there was a little church emblazoned with the arms of the Patriarch of Venice, the door of which, closed by a red curtain, emitted vague scents of incense to mingle with the fumes from the gasthoff's cooking, and a murmur of prayers and organ notes to enhance the discussions of art and philosophy. Sometimes, old women, heads buried in black *bautas*, like bats hooded by their wings, plunged in as the curtain was raised.

Young girls, their hair adorned, draped with shawls in bright colours, passed by, fans in hand, smiles on their lips, gently pushing away with their feet the ruffles with which their skirts were festooned, and, instead of entering the church, took the little alley that leads from Campo San Gallo to the Piazza. They will enter the church later, when they only have God left to love, God being a woman's last passion.

There were also ecclesiastics, fine large fellows, with honest and cheerful faces, going to confession or to some evening office. They wore purple stockings like bishops, and red belts like cardinals, which is, they say, a privilege of Saint Mark's diocese, the patriarchal metropolis.

Opposite the gasthoff, a house of modest appearance is notable for a marble slab charged with a Latin inscription. It was in this house that Canova died. The inscription is beautiful and touching, and I cannot resist the pleasure of recording it here: *Has ædes Francesconiorum quas ob diuternæ amicitiae candorem lautioribus hospitiiis prætulerrat, Antonius Canova, sculpturæ princeps, extremo halitu consecravit III. Id. Oct. An. MDCCCXXII.* Which can be translated thus, on behalf of women who were never taught Latin, and men who have forgotten it: 'This house, owned by Francesconi (*Antonio 'Floriano' Francesconi the owner of Caffè Florian*), being preferred to more sumptuous hospitality through the sincerity born of an old friendship, Canova, the prince of effortless sculpture, consecrated with his last breath, on October the thirteenth 1822.'

Apologies for the somewhat awkward English, which at least renders with accuracy the concise form of the inscription. This is not the place to speak at length about Antonio Canova, who began his wider career in Venice with the showing of his group of Daedalus and Icarus at the Sensa (*the Feast of the Ascension, in 1779*), while still an obscure student of the sculptor Guiseppe Torretto. I shall have the opportunity to return to his works in Rome and Florence.

To this Francesconi house, so nobly preferred to a palace, a puerile memory of ours is attached; in real life, the comedic rubs shoulders with what proves touching. The little dog belonging to that house, who would take his exercise in the campo or in the neighbouring streets, would return at the hour when we dined, that of his dinner probably, and often found the door closed. He barked pitifully on the threshold, but sometimes no one opened the door, I know not if the servants, distracted, did not hear him, or whether they wanted to punish him in some way. One day, touched by his trouble, I went across and pulled the bell-pull on his behalf, and then sat down at our table. A girl appeared at the door, seemingly most surprised to see no one there, and the dog entered, tail low, crawling half on his stomach, like the guilty fellow he was.

He did not forget this service of mine, and, every time he found himself in the same situation, he gazed towards me with a melancholic pleading look, which was impossible to resist. A tacit agreement was established between quadruped and biped. He graced me with an amiable expression and a wagging tail, for the price of one ring of the bell. This is how I found myself linked to the honest dog of the Francesconi house, and how the memory of him is confused in my mind with that of Canova.

After hurrying our modest meal, composed of sea-lice soup, a veal steak, no other kind being consumed in Italy, a *pasticcio* of polenta, and stuffed *zucchette*, we drank a coffee at Caffè Florian and read the *Journal des Débats*, the only French newspaper permitted in the despotic States, and finding nothing of interest on the theatre posters which line the arcades of the Procuracies, we traversed random streets, which is the best way to enter into the everyday life of the people; since guide-books speak of little more than monuments, and other *things of note*, leaving aside all the characteristic details and thousand and one well-nigh imperceptible differences, that alert one at every moment to one's being in a different country.

A large sign at the bottom of Saint Mark's square, on the corner of the Doge's Palace, near the Paglia bridge, over which all of Venice passes in order to stroll on the Riva degli Schiavoni, promised, in gigantic letters with bold illustrations, an incredible and wonderful spectacle. The poster alone was a delight! It advertised a giant mimed melodrama, of the kind that are played at the Cirque Olympique, composed by those illustrious annalists Ferdinand Laloue and Fabrice Labrousse, historiographers of the cannons and gunpowder of the imperial epic, entitled: *Napoleon in Egypt!* But the wonder of the spectacle consisted of a Pyrrhic dance performed by the entire French army around the First Consul. Imagine, if you can, from this, the French Army and the members of the Institute performing a Pyrrhic dance around the Bonaparte described by Auguste Barbier!

*O Corse à cheveux plats: O flat-haired Corsican...*

*(Auguste Barbier: L'Idole)*

A drawing, in barbaric taste, accompanied the poster. Bonaparte, in the rigid costume of the Guides, received the *ulama* of Cairo, humbly prostrated in their caftans, as Turks in Siberian pelisses offered him, according to ancient custom, the keys of Cairo in soup-bowl helmets; a staff-officer, dressed in trousers with foot straps in fine gold and shod with boots à la Suvorov, stood behind the commander-in-chief. Between crenelated towers, we saw wild-eyed Africans passing by on sentinel duty. The poster vaguely recalled, in its savagery of design and Gothic crudeness of colour, an Épinal print, or the plates in *The Four Sons of Aymon* in Bibliothèque Bleu (*'Blue Book'*, equivalent to a *chapbook*) edition.

We did not fail, of course, to attend the show. At eight in the evening, the pre-announced time for the performance, we clambered into our gondola. The gondola is, as we know, the Venetian carriage, whereby one travels not on foot, but by water. The piece was to be played at the Teatro Malibran. Lying on the looped black-leather cushions of our gondola, we were borne along the canals by two vigorous oars, a most pleasant way to travel. The sun had set,

and we glided through water as black as the water of Lethe. From time to time, when crossing beneath bridges, the gleams from gas-lamps shone out, suddenly, patterning the canal with light; then, passage made, darkness returned, as we plunged into the shadows once more, the shadows of night and the watery shadows, skirting the palazzos, from which so many dark tales have fled, from which the noble families, registered in the Golden Book of the serene republic, have departed on their last eternal journey to the tomb.

Finally, our gondola landed. The gondoliers raised their oars, and we moored to a ring sealed in the bank. A long line of gondolas, ranged in a line, awaited their fares. We disembarked and crossed the bridge which leads to the Teatro Malibran. These water-carriages lined up beneath a bridge have a singular appearance, when one is unaccustomed to visiting the Opera or the Circus by boat.

The theatre was entered via a long, vaulted corridor, which resembled, in its splendour, the Radziwill Passage, in Paris. Crude quinquets (*Argand lamps*) on the walls, granted a little light to this narrow passage. We obtained our tickets, and were sent on to another ticket-office, taking one's seat proving a lengthy operation, as there are several bureaucratic stages before one is allowed into one's box. The first ticket-office grants one general access, the second provides access to one's specific destination. Equipped with the ultimate and sacred ticket, we entered our box. In Italy, the boxes are arranged otherwise than with us. The benches, instead of being in front, are at the side, almost like the seating in omnibuses, the left side being reserved for women or notable people whom one wishes to honour or treat with courtesy.

The room was very dark, and we could see below us, in the pit and in the orchestra, a tumultuous agitation of heads whose silhouettes could be vaguely discerned. A darkened room, a suddenly alien microcosm, conveys the idea. The darkness arose from the lack of chandeliers, the ceiling being absent, and the audience viewing the room by means of starlight, under an open sky. I have previously spoken of this arrangement as regards the theatre in Milan, and will avoid repeating the description. The apron is enough to illuminate the actors, and, indeed, providing there are footlights, that suffices. A darkened room seems more mysterious and fanciful in itself, and prevents one's attention wandering to the ladies, their dresses, and the events around one. The less one sees of one's surroundings, the more one is a spectator of the drama.

A French officer has fallen into the power of the followers of Murad Bey and has been imprisoned in the seraglio; but as he is French, an officer and only twenty years old, he will soon capture the hearts of all women. The seraglio's Zoraidas and Zulmes protect him. However, there is discord in Agramante's camp: some wish to return to the city, others to go to war. There is much dispute in the seraglio. Ridiculous people wearing turbans, who seem to have plunged their heads in baking-moulds, parade about, swearing to avenge Mohammed. The muftis, arms crossed on their chests, arrive, preaching holy war. The assassination of the commander-in-chief of the French army is planned: a Muslim of the noblest type, his belt weighed down by yatagans and khanjars, takes upon himself the sinister task. An idiot of a eunuch, voluptuous, gluttonous, and cowardly, traverses the stage.

In the next act, we are in the French camp. Bonaparte appears with a formidable number of staff-officers. The First Consul is here dressed as emperor, by an anachronism allowed in

Venice. He is clad in tall boots, his hands behind his back, his vest transformed into a medieval tabard. He gives orders, grants medals, and pinches the ears of his men familiarly. Now the Muslim, with a long beard, arrives to submit a petition but, suddenly, he raises a three-foot knife towards the general to assassinate him, as they did Kléber, the conqueror of Ptolemais. Fortunately, the murderer is arrested. Bonaparte forgives him, and wins him over by means of a long harangue in gibberish, delivered in Pindaric tones. The moustachioed and bearded Muslim swears to die for the commander-in-chief, and the battle begins.

The suburbs burn, the city burns, the seraglio is ablaze, never has such a fire been seen. The muftis mourn, their arms still crossed, and the enemy soldiers, abandoning their weapons, weep beneath their baking-moulds. Only the women dressed in light veils refrain from crying. In this Egypt, the women are the men. The French officer emerges from the trunk in which love has concealed him, he takes the seraglio, fights the Sultan, Murad Bey, conquers the enemy lines with the point and edge of his blade, and triumphs in a mighty struggle for the flag. Finally, Bonaparte arrives, followed by the inevitable entourage, forgives everyone, rolls his eyes towards the sky, and takes a pinch of snuff while thinking of Frederick the Great who is no more (*Frederick died in 1786*) and of the Eighteenth of Brumaire which is yet to come (*in 1799*).

The French army expresses its delight, and performs, as the programme promised, a flamboyant Pyrrhic dance around its general. The drum beats *La Diane (the Reveille)*, the guns flourish bouquets, and all the world exults with joy. To end the celebration, the scornful drums beat out a patriotic refrain that the enthusiastic audience in the room encores, and the curtain falls.

I neglected to say that Hungarian soldiers, in white jackets and blue trousers, represented the French army, for greater historical accuracy.

We returned to our gondola, and went for a stroll in the Piazzetta, by the light of the moon. The Teatro San Benedetto, currently Teatro San Gallo, promised a lyric troupe for the autumn season, but we were to leave Venice before they arrived. Teatro La Fenice was closed, as La Scala, in Milan, had been.

## **Part XVII: The Accademia di Belle Arti**

At the entrance to the Grand Canal, next to the white church of La Salute, and opposite the red houses of the Campo San Vidal, a scene illustrated in Canaletto's masterpiece, rises the Academy of Fine Arts (*La Scuola Grande*), in which through the care and attention of the late Count Leopoldo Cicognara, a large number of treasures from the Venetian school have been gathered together.

The architecture of the façade of La Scuola Grande is by Giorgio Massari, and the sculptor Antonio Giacarelli sculpted a Minerva seated on the Adriatic lion which decorates the summit (*since removed to the Castello gardens*). The statue pleased me only moderately. Minerva is a big girl, sculpted with robust charm, who in no way resembles that ideal figure exiting, armed,

from Jupiter's head. Her mount, treated in the style of those meek lions in Louis XIV wigs, with a globe under one paw, seen on the terrace of the Tuileries, looks a bit like a poodle among the crowd of tongued, clawed, winged, armed, and haloed lions, of fierce appearance and heraldic presence which accompany Saint Mark on all the buildings of Venice. Perhaps this humble lion, not wishing to frighten visitors with too truculent an appearance, is biased towards the benign.

When one thinks of the Venetian school, three names inevitably come to mind. Titian, Paulo Veronese, and Tintoretto. They seem to have hatched suddenly from the most azure of seas, beneath a warm ray of sunlight, in a spontaneous flowering. After them come Giovanni Bellini and Giorgione, and that is the sum total. I am speaking here of the general public and the normal run of amateurs who have not visited Italy or made a special study of Venetian painting. However, there is a whole series of almost unknown, yet admirable, artists, who preceded the great names that I have cited, as the dawn precedes the day, less brilliant, but fresher, more tender. These artists of the Venetian Gothic, to all the naive finesse, all the smoothness, all the suavity of Giotto, Perugino, or Hans Memling, join an elegance, beauty and richness of colour that the latter never attained. A singular thing: the works of these latter colourists have almost all turned black, the harmony of their palette has vanished beneath smoky varnish; the glaze is gone, the outlines of their underlying sketches have emerged through the upper layers, while the works of the earlier designers, their humble, meticulous efforts, their lack of impasto, their simple local tone, retain an incomparable brightness and youthfulness.

These panels and canvases, often preceding by a hundred years or so the paintings of the famous, seem, were it not for their style which dates them, as if completed yesterday; they have still all the glow of novelty: the centuries have passed without leaving a trace. Not a single sign of retouching or repainting. Is this due to the fact that the pigments used were purer, chemistry not being advanced enough to over-sophisticate them, or to invent new ones of uncertain effect and problematic durability? Or is it rather that those hues, left well-nigh pure as in illuminated manuscripts, have retained the same values as they possessed on the palette? I cannot decide; but this remark, more clearly applicable to their work, also applies to all the schools of art that preceded what is termed the Renaissance. The older the painting, the better preserved it is. A Van Eyck is fresher than a Van Dyck, an Andrea Mantegna than a Raphael, and an Antonio Vivarini than a Tintoretto. The same applies to the frescoes: the most modern have deteriorated the most.

We were prepared, in a way, by the masterpieces spread throughout the galleries of France, Spain, England, Belgium, and Holland, for the wonders of Titian, Paulo Veronese, and Tintoretto. These great artists in no way deceived us. They fulfilled, faithfully, all the promise of their genius, while we were expecting that same; rather, we experienced a delightful surprise on seeing the works, little known outside Venice, of Giovanni and Gentile Bellini, of Marco Basaiti, of Rocco Marconi, Giovanni Mansueti, Vittore Carpaccio, and others, the complete list of whom would degenerate into a mere catalogue. It was a whole new world; to find Venetian brilliance in the form of Gothic naivety, the beauty of the South in the somewhat stiff shapes of the North, paintings by Holbein as colourful as those of Giorgione, and those of

Lucas Cranach as elegant as those of Raphael, was rare good fortune, and we were perhaps more sensible of it than was needed; for, in the first fire of enthusiasm, we were not far from regarding the illustrious masters, the eternal glories of the Venetian school, as corrupters of taste, and great decadents, almost like those neo-Christian Germans who ban Raphael from the paradise of Catholic painters, as too sensual and too pagan.

For a few days these new names were the sole things on our lips; because, when one has made some fresh artistic discovery, one cannot help but imitate Jean de La Fontaine who stopped people in the street to ask: 'Have you read Baruch?' (*Baruch ben Neriah, a pupil of the prophet Jeremiah is credited with writing the Book of Baruch, in the Apocrypha*).

If I were writing a history of Venetian painting, and not of my travels, I would start with Niccolò Semitecolo, the earliest artist represented in the Accademia collection, who died in 1370, and continue chronologically down to Francesco Zucharelli, the latest, who died in 1788; but the gallery is not arranged in this manner, and my scheme, which should be followed everywhere, would not correspond to the actual locations occupied by the paintings, which are hung based solely on their dimensions. I will proceed room by room, and the reader can follow my descriptions on the page, as they would see the works hung on the walls.

The Academy of Fine Arts, as we know, occupies the former Scuola Grande de la Carita. There is still some original decoration, a very beautiful ceiling in the first room. This ceiling, divided into panels each showing a cherub's face in the centre encircled by wings, is associated with a minor legend: a member of the Society was responsible for gilding it at his own expense, asking in recompense that his name be registered as a donor. This satisfaction was denied him. The member, Cherubino Ottale, achieved his wish nonetheless; he took care to sign his donation with an ingenious ornamental rebus. Ottale, in Italian, means octal. The cherub's heads, wreathed by eight wings, represent, hieroglyphically, the first and last names of this conceited bourgeois who makes himself known thus to posterity, a forgivable act of vainglory, since the ceiling is very ornate, in exquisite taste, and must have emptied the member's purse of a significant quantity of gold coins.

This room is the Salon Carré, the exhibition gallery, of the Academy of Fine Arts; it is a showcase in which are arranged, in the best-lighted locations, the purest diamonds, the Koh-i-Noors, Great Moguls, Regents, and Sancys of this rich Venetian mine, whose veins have produced so many precious artistic gems.

Every great Venetian painter has left here a superior example of his talent, a masterpiece of masterpieces, one of those supreme works where genius and talent, inspiration and skill, came together in rare harmony; a conjunction difficult to achieve, even in the lives of the greatest of artists. On that day, the hand was able to achieve what the mind wished, as in that sphere of Paradise where Dante says: 'Our wills are unified' (*Divine Comedy, Paradiso, Canto III:80*).

*The Calling of the Sons of Zebedee*, by Marco Basaiti, is close to the German school in its naivety of detail, slightly sad tenderness of tone, and a certain melancholy unusual in the Italian school. The Master of Nuremberg (*Albrecht Durer*) would not have disavowed this landscape, both fantastic and real, with its Gothic castle adorned with pepperbox turrets, drawbridge, and

barbicans, at the edge of Lake Tiberias, while a fisherman from Chioggia or the Murazzi would find nothing wrong with that fishing boat and its nets in the foreground, so humbly and faithfully studied; the figure of Christ possesses unction and sweetness, the figures of the two future apostles, who leave the lake's fishes behind to fish for men, breathe an atmosphere of living faith.

One should also halt in front of *Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata*, by Francesco Beccarucci di Conegliano. It is a very beautiful thing. The composition is divided into two zones, an upper zone, in which we see the saint extending his hands with the divine imprints, in glorious resemblance to the Saviour which his devotion earned him; and a lower zone, populated by saints and the blessed, mostly seeming to be of the Franciscan order, and appearing to rejoice in the miracle. There are beautifully painted ascetic heads here, profound religious feeling, and a perfection of execution, though somewhat dry. When one examines these Gothic paintings, of a cold and stiff appearance, carefully, they come to life, little by little, and end by gaining an extraordinary living power; however, they offer neither a grasp of the science of anatomy nor a superfluity of muscles and flesh. These awkward characters, have the air of reticent folk who would like to address you but do not dare, yet dream of saying what is in their hearts: their gestures are often gauche; but their physiognomy is so benign, so gentle, so childishly sincere, that one half-understands them, and they remain indelible in one's memory. Beneath their maladroit appearance, they possess something that other more skilful masterpieces lack: soul.

I admit to a feeling of horror at the Bassanos, older and younger. The eternal animal paintings from their workshop spread throughout Europe, tedious and worthless art, reproduced mechanically, justifying my extreme aversion. However, I must agree that *The Resurrection of Lazarus*, by Leandro Bassano, is better than all those entries and exits from the Ark, sheepfolds, rustic parklands, pails, sheep's backsides, and women in red petticoats milking, that are the despair of visitors to every gallery.

Let me mention in passing *The Wedding at Cana*, by Alessandro Varotari, a large, wide, well-ordered, canvas, of skilful execution, and laudable in all respects, which, anywhere else, would appear a masterpiece, and we reach a singular painting by Paris Bordone, whose magnificent portrait of a man dressed in black everyone may admire in the Louvre, not far from the man with the reddish beard and calf-leather gloves, which after being attributed to several great masters, seems likely to be permanently declared a Titian.

Bordone's painting, which represents a fisherman presenting Saint Mark's ring to the Doge, relates to a legend, of which a strange incident was depicted by Giorgione, as we will see in the next room. Here is the story in brief: one night when the fisherman slept aboard his boat, moored conveniently by the landing-stage of San Giorgio Maggiore, three mysterious individuals jumped into his vessel and ordered him to take them to the Lido; one of the three characters, as far as could be discerned amidst the shadows, had an apostolic beard, and the look of a high dignitary of the Church; both the others, by a definite glimpse of armour concealed beneath their coats, showed themselves to be men of the sword. The boatman turned the prow of his vessel towards the Lido and began to ply his oars; but the lagoon, initially calm began to churn and stir strangely: the waves shone with sinister light, monstrous apparitions

emerged to menace the boat, to the great fear of the gondolier; hideous forms, devils half-human and half-fish, seemed to race from the Lido towards the city, causing the waves to foam in a thousand scintillations, stirring a tempest, and whistling and howling amidst the storm; but the flaming swords brandished by the two knights and the outstretched hand of the holy personage made them retreat, then vanish, in sulphurous explosions.

The battle was of long duration; fresh demons forever followed the first; however victory rested with those in the boat, who were returned safely to the Piazzetta landing-stage. The boatman knew not what to think of these strange happenings; then, as they departed, the oldest of the group, a golden halo suddenly shining forth above him, said to the boatman: 'I am Saint Mark, the patron saint of Venice. I learned last night that the devils, gathered in council at the Lido, in the cemetery there, had formed the resolution to rouse a dreadful storm and destroy my beloved city, under the pretext that many debaucheries are enacted there which grant evil spirits power over its residents; but, as Venice is a good Catholic, and will confess her sins, in the fine cathedral she will raise for me, I resolved to defend her from this danger of which she was unaware, with the help of my two brave companions, Saint George and Saint Theodore, and commandeered your boat; now, as every effort deserves its reward and you have spent a difficult night, here is my ring; take it to the Doge and tell him what you saw. He will give you enough gold coins to fill your hat.'

With this, the saint resumed his place on the summit of the porch of Saint Mark's cathedral, Saint Theodore climbed to the top of his column, where his crocodile, in a bad mood, grumbled away, and Saint George went to nestle at the bottom of his columned niche, in the large window of the Doge's Palace.

The boatman, much surprised, and with good reason, might have thought he had dreamed the episode having drunk a few too many glasses of Samian wine that evening, were it not that the large, heavy ring of gold, studded with precious gems, which he held in his hand, prevented his doubting the reality of the night's events.

He, therefore, set off to seek the Doge who, horned cap on his head, was presiding over the Senate, and kneeling, respectfully, told the tale of the battle between the demons and the lords of Venice. The story seemed incredible at first; but the presence of the ring, which was truly that of Saint Mark, and whose absence from the church treasury had been noted, proved the boatman's veracity. The ring, kept in a carefully guarded coffer secured by triple locks which bore no traces of tampering, could only have been removed by a superior power. The boatman's hat was filled with gold, and a thanksgiving Mass was celebrated to mark their escape from danger; which did not prevent the Venetians from continuing their dissolute lifestyle, spending the nights at masked balls, in gaming, dining, making love, indulging in intrigue, and prolonging for a good six months of the year their extended orgy known as the Carnival. Venetians count on Saint Mark's protection for their entry into Paradise, and take no notice otherwise of their salvation. As the matter involved Saint Mark, they built him a correspondingly fine church, and the saint is still under obligation to them.

Paris Bordone chose for his painting the moment when the boatman knelt before the Doge. The composition of the scene is very picturesque; we see in perspective a long line of black-capped or hoary heads of senators, of magisterial appearance. Curious onlookers line the

pavement and form skilfully contrasted groups; sumptuous Venetian costumes are displayed there in all their splendour. As in almost all the paintings of this school, the architecture plays a major role. Beautiful porticos, in Palladian style, animated by characters going to and fro, fill the remainder of the scene.

This painting possesses the merit, rare in the Italian school, which is almost exclusively occupied with reproducing religious or mythological subjects, of depicting a popular legend, a scene of manners, ultimately a subject for Romanticism, such as Delacroix or Louis Boulanger might have chosen, and executed with skilful nuances; and this gives it a unique physiognomy, and a most peculiar attractiveness.

A young French painter, Louis Marius Garcin, was in the process of making a copy of this beautiful canvas which I hope soon to view in Paris.

It seems to me that a gallery exhibiting well-executed copies of the masterpieces of every school would be a thing of interest and beneficial to the arts. Many elements of such a gallery already exist. I would devote a room to each great master filled with copies of their entire production, now scattered in museums and churches across Europe; I would choose also masters of the second rank, original, spirited and, though genius is absent, full of talent. And I would unite, in that one place, all that is scattered throughout the world, the viewing of which requires, long, expensive, or unachievable journeys.

Space in the Palais des Beaux-Arts, or the Louvre, would be perfect for such a collection, which, in addition to the instructiveness it would offer artists, would have the advantage of extending the life, or at least the memory, of masterpieces on the verge of disappearing.

## **Part XVIII: The Accademia continued**

The pearl of the Prado in Madrid is a Raphael; that of the Accademia of Venice is a Titian, a marvellous canvas forgotten, and then found again, about which there is a tale. For many years Venice possessed this masterpiece without knowing it. Relegated to an old church which was little attended, it had slowly disappeared under layers of dust, and behind a network of spiders' webs. Its subject could barely be discerned. One day, Count Leopoldo Cicognora, an art connoisseur, detecting a certain something in its obscured figures, and scenting a masterpiece beneath its livery of abandonment and misery, moistened a portion of the canvas with a drop of saliva, and rubbed it with his finger, not exactly an action of great propriety, but one which an art lover could not help but execute when face to face with a smoky patina, were he twenty times a Count, and a thousand times more proper. This spot on the noble canvas, preserved intact under the layer of dust, like Pompeii beneath its cloak of ashes, revealed paintwork so young and fresh, that the Count had no doubt that he had found an unknown masterpiece by some great master. He had the strength of mind to control his emotion, and proposed to the priest to exchange the large dilapidated painting for a beautiful, brand-new one, clean, pristine, and well-framed, which would honour the church and please the faithful. The priest accepted

with pleasure, smiling to himself at the oddity of this Count, who gave something new for something old and asked nothing in return.

Cleansed of the filth that soiled it, Titian's *Assunta* (*The Assumption of the Virgin, now returned to the Frari church*) appeared radiant as the sun conquering the clouds. Parisians can get an idea of the importance of this discovery by going to the Beaux-Arts and viewing Henri Serrur's beautiful, recently-executed copy currently placed there.

The *Assunta* is one of Titian's greatest works, and the one in which he rose to the greatest heights of art: the composition is balanced and organised with infinite skill. The upper, arched portion, represents paradise, *glory*, to speak, in the ascetic language of the Spanish. A semi-circle of angels, drenched and lost to incalculable depths in a flood of light, glittering sparks above a flame, sparkling more vividly than the eternal day, form a halo for God the Father, who arrives from infinite depth, with the motion of a soaring eagle, accompanied by an archangel and a seraph who hold a crown and wreath respectively.

This Jehovah, seeming like a divine bird, presenting himself as a head and body in horizontal foreshortening beneath a flow of flying draperies like open wings, astonishes with its sublime boldness; if it is possible for a human hand to depict the figure of the divine, Titian certainly succeeded. Boundless power, with imperishable maturity make this white-bearded face shine, the beard needing only to quiver to shake off the eternal snow; since the *Olympian Jupiter* of Phidias, never has the master of heaven and earth been represented more worthily.

The centre of the painting is occupied by the Virgin Mary, who is raised, or rather surrounded by, a garland of angels and blessed souls, since she requires no help in ascending to heaven; she rises through the strength of her robust faith, the purity of her soul, lighter than the most luminous ether. There is, in truth, in this figure an incredible power of ascension, but to obtain his effect, Titian avoided resorting to a slender form, with tapered draperies, in translucent colours. His Madonna is truly a most real, active, and beautiful woman, as solid as the *Venus de Milo* in the Tribune Room of the Uffizi in Florence, or the *Venus of Urbino* also to be found there. An ample and substantial gown with numerous folds flutters around her; its breadth might well have contained a deity, and, if she was not on a cloud, the Marquis du Guast might well lay his hand on her breast, as in the painting in the Louvre (*Allegory of Marriage*). And yet nothing is more celestially beautiful than this bold, strong figure in her pink robe and azure mantle; despite the powerful voluptuousness of the body, the gaze sparkles with purest virginity.

In the lower section of the painting, the apostles are grouped together in various attitudes of delight and skilfully-contrasted surprise. Two or three little angels, who connect them to the intermediate zone of the composition, seem to be explaining to them the miracle that is occurring. The heads of the apostles, of varied ages and character, are painted with a force of life and a surprising reality. The draperies have the amplitude and abundant spread which characterises Titian's style, both of the richest and yet the simplest.

Viewing this Virgin, and comparing the artist's concept to the Virgins of other different masters, I thought how wonderful and ever fresh art is. The endless variations on this theme of the Madonna, in the catalogue of paintings with Catholic subjects, without ever exhausting the

theme, surprises and confounds the imagination; but on reflection, one realises that, to the common subject, each painter adds a fond dream, and a personification of their talent.

Are not Albrecht Dürer's Madonnas, in their painful somewhat constrained grace, their weary faces more interesting than beautiful, their air of matrons rather than virgins, their German bourgeois candour, their tight clothing broken by symmetrical pleats, who are almost always accompanied by a rabbit, an owl, or a monkey, in a vague recollection perhaps of Germanic pantheism, are not they depictions of the ideal woman he favoured and might have loved? And does she not represent the very genius of that artist? As much as she is his Madonna, she might easily be his Muse.

The same applies to Raphael. The type of his Madonna, where, mingled with Classical memories, one always finds the features of *La Fornarina*, sometimes anticipated, sometimes copied, most often idealised, is it not that type, graceful and imbued with a chaste voluptuousness, a most accurate symbolisation of his elegant talent? That Christian, nourished by Plato and Greek art, a friend of Leo X the dilettante pope, that artist who died of love while painting the Transfiguration, does he not live on, entire, in those modest Venuses, holding that child on their knees who is the God of Love? If we wished, in an allegorical table, to symbolise the genius of each painter, could the angel of Urbino be represented otherwise?

Does not the Virgin of the *Assunta*, large, strong, and colourful, with her robust, healthy grace, her beautiful bearing, her simple and natural beauty, represent Titian with all his qualities? One could research the matter further; but I have said enough to make my point.

Thanks to the dusty shroud that cloaked her for so long, the *Assunta* shines with a youthful brilliance, as if centuries have not passed by, and we enjoy the supreme pleasure of seeing a painting by Titian as it issued from his palette.

Opposite Titian's *Assunta*, is *The Miracle of the Slave*, by Tintoretto, being the one picture robust and powerful enough to face so splendid a masterpiece. Tintoretto is the king of the violent. He has a passion for composition, a fury in his brushwork, an audacity in his foreshortenings, and this *Miracle of Saint Mark* may pass for one of his boldest and fiercest paintings.

The work has as its subject the patron saint of Venice aiding a poor slave to whom a barbaric master has caused grief and torment because of the stubborn devotion that the poor fellow showed to the saint himself. The slave is lying on the ground on a cross, surrounded by his executioners busily making vain attempts to nail him to the dreaded timber. The nails are blunted, their mallets break, their axes fly to pieces; more merciful than mankind, the instruments of torture are dulled in the hands of the torturers; they gaze at each other questioningly and whisper together in their astonishment; the judge leans down from the gallery of the court to see why its orders are not being carried out; while Saint Mark, in one of the most violent foreshortenings ever risked by a painter, plunges headfirst from heaven to earth, eschewing clouds, wings, and cherubim, without any of the aerial means commonly used in sacred paintings, on his way to delivering the man who has faith in him. This vigorous, athletically-muscular figure, of colossal proportions, splitting the air like a missile launched from a catapult, produces a most singular effect.

The design has such power, that the massive figure of the saint is sustained by the eye, and appears not to fall, in a true *tour-de-force*. Add to this that the paint is so intense of tone, so abrupt in its contrasts of light and shade, so vigorous in its placements, so harsh and turbulent in touch, that Caravaggio and the fiercest painters of the Spanish school would seem as weak as rose-water beside it, and you will gain some idea of this painting which, despite its barbarities, always preserves, through its setting, that abundant and sumptuous architectural appearance, that is unique to the Venetian school.

There is also, in the same room, an *Adam and Eve*, and a *Cain and Abel*, by the same painter, two magnificent canvases in the form of studies, perhaps the most accomplished products, from the point of view of execution, that the artist produced.

Against a background of a muted and mysterious green, the distance foliage of Eden, or rather the wall of the workshop, two superb bodies, with a white and warm glow, vivacious complexion, and powerful reality are highlighted: it seems that Eve is offering Adam the fatal apple which stuck in his throat, a scene which sufficiently legitimises the presence of two naked figures in the open air; but that is of no importance. Believe that never did a more beautiful torso, whiter and softer flesh emerge from the brush of a colourist. Tintoretto, who according to his biographer Carlo Ridolfi wrote on his studio wall: 'The draughtsmanship of Michelangelo and the colours of Titian', completed, in this painting, at least half of that program.

The painting of *Cain and Abel*, its counterpart, breathes all the fury, and savagery to be expected of such a subject and such a painter. Death, the consequence of our first parents' error, makes its entry into the young world, amidst formidable shadows, in which murderer and victim struggle together. At the corner of the canvas, there is a dreadful detail, A severed sheep's head bleeds. Is this the sacrifice offered up by Abel, or a symbol implying that animals as well as innocent human beings must bear the penalty for Eve's curiosity? Dare we affirm that; it was probably not in Tintoretto's mind. He had other matters to think of than such niceties, he, the greatest master of design, the most intrepid plier of the artists' brush who ever existed, and who worked more swiftly than Luca Giordano, called 'Fa Presto'.

Bonifazio Veronese, of whose work the Louvre has only one inadequate example, is an admirable artist. His *Parable of the Rich Man*, in the Accademia, copied, most intelligently, by Henri Serrur, to whom we already owe a beautiful facsimile of the *Assunta*, is a deeply Venetian painting. There is no lack of beautiful women with coiled braids, threads of pearls, dresses of velvet and brocade, along with magnificent lords in gallant and courteous poses, musicians, pages, an African servant, a rich damask tablecloth, dishes of gold and silver, and dogs crossing the mosaic paving, one sniffing the rags of Lazarus with the mistrust of a well-behaved creature; there is a balustraded terrace, where wine stands in ancient vessels; white colonnades behind which the dappled blue of the sky can be seen. Only, the silvery greys of Paulo Veronese here take on an amber tint, the silver turns a golden-red. Bonifazio, who painted portraits, gave his heads a more intimate feel than did the creator of the four great Feasts, and the ceilings of the Doge's palace, accustomed to regarding things from the point of view of decoration. The physiognomies of Bonifazio, studied, and individual, in their characteristics, faithfully recall the patricians of Venice, who so often posed for the artist. Anachronism in the costumes reveals

that the subject of Lazarus is only a pretext and that the real purpose of the painting is to show the lords, with their courtesans and mistresses, in the depths of one of those lovely palazzos which bathe their marble feet in the green waters of the Grand Canal.

Refrain from passing too swiftly in front of these apostles of a beauty, a richness of colour, and a seriousness as regards religion, that the Venetian school does not always show, especially from the mid-sixteenth century onwards, when the pagan ideas of the Renaissance were introduced into art, and further increased the sensualist tendencies of these sumptuous masters. The Accademia has a large number of works by Bonifazio. This one room, besides *The Parable of the Rich Man*, and the apostles whom I mentioned, contains an *Adoration of the Magi*, a *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*, a *Saint Jerome and Saint Beatrix*, a *Saint Mark*, and a *Christ Enthroned with Saints*, all paintings of the greatest merit and which valiantly support the neighbouring works by Titian, Tintoretto and Paolo Veronese.

A great painter, little known in France, is Rocco Marconi, an artist of pure style and deep feeling, a sort of Italian Albrecht Dürer, less fanciful and less imaginative than the German, but owing to a kind of archaic tranquillity in his manner, which makes him appear older than his contemporaries, as Ingres does among the likes of Eugène Delacroix, Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps, Thomas Couture, Charles Louis Müller and Narcisse Diaz. His *Christ between Saint Peter and Saint Andrew* recalls a similar subject by the painter of *The Apotheosis of Homer* (Ingres), which was formerly in the church of Trinità dei Monti, in Rome, and which can now be seen at the Luxembourg (*Christ Returning the Keys to Saint Peter*, now in the *Musée Ingres in Montauban*). The heads possess both character and nobility, the draperies are pleated in great taste, and the group, firmly coloured, stands out against a slice of sky flaked with fluffy clouds. I have mentioned Albrecht Dürer and Ingres in describing Marconi's art: a third, even more exact resemblance comes to mind, that with the Spanish painter Juan de Juanes, in his admirable paintings of the life of Saint Stephen; there is the same purity, the same quiet and sober use of colour.

Here, on a stretch of wall, is a whole group of paintings by those Venetian Gothic artists, so suave, ingenuous, sweet and charming, about whom I spoke a few words on entering the Accademia.

Giovanni Bellini, Cima da Conegliano, and Vittore Carpaccio present themselves to us, all three with the same subject, one which sufficed for the entire Middle Ages and produced thousands of masterpieces: namely the Madonna and Child on a throne surrounded by saints, usually the patron saints of the recipient, a usage which makes pedants cry anachronism, on the pretext that it is not natural for Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Sebastian, Saint Catherine or any other saint to be in the same scene as the Holy Virgin, mingling medieval costume with antique draperies.

These critics fail to understand that, for a living faith, times and places co-exist, and there is nothing more touching than this rapprochement between the object of adoration and the devotee, a true rapprochement, because the Madonna was regarded as a living being, contemporary, current; she took part in the existence of all; she served as an ideal for all humble lovers, a mother to all the afflicted. She was not relegated to the depths of the sky, to which we relegate the gods in an age of unbelief, under the pretext of respect; one lived on terms of

familiarity with her, confided one's sorrows to her, and one's hopes, and no one would have been surprised to see her appear in the street in the company of a monk, cardinal, nun or any other holy person. All the more reason to readily admit to a painting that mixture which shocks the purists and which is deeply Catholic.

For my part, I take infinite pleasure in those thrones and canopies, with their precious and delicate ornamentation, those Madonnas with the child on their knees, and those little angels, naively haloed in gold as if mere colour was insufficient for them, playing the viola d'amore, rebec or angelica.

Yes, despite my penchant for pagan art, I love those naive Gothic paintings, those Fathers of the Church wearing a cardinal's biretta and bearing large missals under one arm; those Saint Georges in knightly armour, those chastely naked Saint Sebastians, like Christian Apollos, who, instead of firing arrows, receive them; those priests, saints and monks in their beautiful flowered dalmatic robes and their black or white frocks, with fine minute pleats; those young female saints leaning on a wheel, while holding a palm-frond, ladies of honour to the Heavenly Queen; all that loving and devout procession that gathers humbly in the lower section of some apotheosis of the Virgin Mother. I find that this arrangement, hieratic in its manner, satisfies the requirements of church painting, as it is understood, more effectively than scholarly compositions conceived from the viewpoint of historical accuracy. There is, in this method of composition, a sacred rhythm which captures the eye of the faithful. Those aspects of the image, so necessary, to our mind, in matters of devotion, are preserved, and art loses nothing: because, constrained on the one hand, individuality reclaims its rights on the other; every artist leaves the mark of their originality on the manner of the work's execution, and these paintings, composed of similar elements, are perhaps the most personal. Carpaccio's winged virtuosos bear no resemblance to those of Giovanni Bellini, although they sound their instruments, at the feet of the Virgin, on the steps of an almost identical baldachin. Those of Carpaccio are more elegant, with a more youthful grace, seeming like pages from a noble household; those of Giovanni Bellini are naiver, more childish, more babyish; they perform their music with the zeal of children in some country choir under the eye of their priest. All are charming, but of a diverse grace, marked by the character of the painter (*See Carpaccio's 'Presentation of Jesus in the Temple' and Bellini's 'San Giobbe Altarpiece', both in the Accademia*).

## **Part XIX: The Accademia further continued**

*The Holy Family* by Paolo Veronese, is composed in the painter's usual abundant and sumptuous style. Clearly, lovers of honest reality will not find the humble interior of a poor carpenter there. That column, wrapped in pink brocatelle from Verona, that opulent foliate curtain, whose richly pleated folds form the background of the painting, proclaims a princely dwelling; but *The Holy Family* is rather an apotheosis than the exact representation of Joseph's poor household. The presence of Saint Francis carrying a palm-frond, of a priest in a chain-mail neck-guard, and a saint on the nape of whose neck is curled, like a horn of Ammon, a brilliant rope of golden hair in Venetian fashion, along with the quasi-royal dais on which the divine Mother is enthroned presenting her toddler to their adoration, provides abundant proof.

In the second room, an immense canvas depicts the *Feast in the House of Levi*, one of four large paintings of feasts by Veronese. The Louvre has two: the *Supper at Emmaus*, and the *Wedding at Cana* of the same size as the Venetian painting, which is in the same style, ample, ornate, and effortless; the same silvery gleam, the same air of feasting and joy. In his paintings, there are swarthy men in their opulent gowns of damask or brocade, blonde women dripping with pearls, African slaves carrying dishes and ewers, children frolicking on the steps of balustrades, pale greyhounds, columns and statues of marble, beautiful skies of a bright turquoise blue, which creates the illusion, in this case, when, on standing back, you view its sky framed by the door of the next room, of a diorama. Paolo Veronese, not excluding Titian, Rubens, and Rembrandt, is perhaps the greatest colourist who ever existed. His palette is neither full of yellows like Titian, nor reds like Rubens, nor bituminous like Rembrandt. He paints in the open with an astonishing rightness of location: none know better than him the relationships between hues, and their relative values; he knows more about them than the chemist Michel Chevreul and obtains, through juxtaposition, nuances of an exquisite freshness which, separated, would seem grey and earthy. No one displays to the same degree that velvety, flowery light.

The composition of the *Annunciation*, by the same artist, is notable. The Virgin Mary, leaning at one end of the long transverse canvas, the central void of which is occupied by elegant architecture, awaits with a modest air the arrival of the angel relegated to the other end of the painting, who, with open wings, seems to glide towards her in angelic greeting. This arrangement, contrary to the rule which places the group towards which the painter wishes to draw one's eyes at the centre of the scene, is a brilliant fancy which might not have been executed so happily by any other than Paul Veronese.

The Venetians winning victory over the Turks, thanks to the intervention of Saint Justina (*Allegory of the Battle of Lepanto*), is one of these subjects which appeal to the national self-esteem and which one finds often repeated. I have already had cause to describe a similar composition in the Doge's Palace; the mix of armour and costumes, helmets and turbans, Christians and infidels, was a happy theme for the artist, and he treated it skilfully. I cannot describe in detail all the works of Paolo Veronese that the Accademia contains. It would take a volume dedicated to the subject; since all these Venetian geniuses displayed a prodigious fecundity.

The Accademia possesses one of Titian's last paintings, a priceless treasure! The years, so heavy for all, passed without pressing too hard on this patriarch of painting, whose life was long, and whom the plague surprised still working, at almost ninety years old.

The painting, serious and melancholy in appearance, whose funereal subject seems a presentiment of his own death, represents a Christ removed from the cross (*Pietà*); the sky is dark, a livid light illuminates the corpse supported piously by Joseph of Arimathea and Saint Mary Magdalene. Both are sad, shadowed, and appear, from their gloomy attitude, to despair of the resurrection of their Master. We see them questioning, with secret anxiety, how this body, anointed with balm, which they will entrust to the sepulchre, could ever emerge from thence; in truth, Titian never depicted so dead a corpse. There is no longer a drop of blood beneath the greenish skin, in those bluish veins the colour of life has ebbed forever. *Christ in*

*the Garden of Olives*, by Eugène Delacroix in the church of Saint-Paul Saint-Louis, and his *Pieta*, in the church of Saint-Denys-de-Saint-Sacrament, alone can give an idea of this sinister and painful work, where, for the first time, the great Venetian abandoned his former, unalterable serenity. The shadow of approaching death seems to battle the light in this work of a painter who always had the sun on his palette, and it envelops the painting in a cold twilight. The artist's hand froze before being able to complete his task, as evidenced by the inscription in black letters at the foot of the canvas: *Quod Titianus inchoatum relict Palma reverenter absolvit Deoque dicavit opus: what Titian left unfinished, Palma, with reverence, completed and offered to God*. This noble, touching, and religious inscription renders the painting a monument to the master.

Doubtless, Palma Giovane, a fine painter himself, must have trembled on approaching the work of the greater artist, and his brush, however skilful, must have hesitated, and wavered more than once perhaps, when adding to Titian's brushstrokes.

If this *omega* of Titian's picturesque life is to be found in the Accademia, the *alpha* can also be found there, in the form of a large painting whose subject is *The Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple*. This canvas was painted by Titian in his youth. Tradition claims he was only fourteen years old, which is ridiculous, given the beauty of the work. Nonetheless, taking a sensible view, the *Presentation* doubtless dates back to the painter's early career, and we can judge the immense distance travelled. All the qualities of the artist are germinal in this earlier work. They developed more fully subsequently, but already exist there in a visible manner. The splendour of the architecture, the grandiose stances of the old men, the proud and abundant flow of the draperies, the placement of the colours, the masculine simplicity of workmanship, all reveal the master in the younger man. The bright clear tones, that the high sun of a virile old age will gild with warmer notes, already possess the masculine solidity, the robust consistency, and distinctive characteristics of the creator of *Sacred and Profane Love*, in the Borghese Palace in Rome; of the *Venus of Urbino* in the Uffizi in Florence, and the *Allegory of Marriage* in the Louvre.

Titian is, in my opinion, the only entirely healthy artist to have appeared since antiquity. He has the powerful serenity and strength of Phidias. There is nothing feverish about him, nothing tormented, nothing unquiet. The disease of modernity has not touched him. He is handsome, robust, and calm like some pagan artist of ancient and better days. His superb nature flourishes, at ease, in a warm azure, beneath a hot sun, his tones reminiscent of those beautiful antique works, in marble, gilded by the fair light of Greece; without struggle, effort, violence. He achieves the ideal at the first stroke, almost without thought. A calm, lively joy illuminates his immense oeuvre. The reality of death alone he seems to doubt, except perhaps in that last painting. Without sensual ardour, without voluptuous intoxication, he reveals to the sight, in purple and gold, the beauty, the youth, all the amorous poetry, of the female body, with the impassivity of God revealing a naked Eve to Adam. He sanctifies nudity with this expression of supreme repose, of beauty fixed forever, the absolute realised, which renders the freest works of the ancients chaste. He alone only has depicted women who could, without appearing weak and sickly, lie down next to the reclining woman of the east pediment of the Parthenon (*see the Cast of Aphrodite and Dione, in the British Museum*).

In speaking, of the fisherman bringing the Doge the ring of Saint Mark, I related the associated legend. Giorgione treated another episode of this wonderful story, the battle of Saint George and Saint Theodore against the demons. Regardless of the admiration I feel for Giorgione's, warm, lively and colourful *Pastoral Concert (in the Louvre)*, I admit to only a moderate liking for this work of his in the Accademia ('*Storm at Sea*' is now attributed to *Palma Vecchio*). Those athletic reddish demons, frolicking in the midst of greenish water, that arrested muscular fantasy, those forms of man and fish, un-mysteriously combined, do not in any way respond to the chimerical idea of such a fight as I imagine. The bright skies of Venetian art lack darkness enough for imaginary monsters out of dreamlike legend to swarm there at ease. Daylight hinders the horned creatures and shapeless larvae that hide in the shadow of Faust's stove, Rembrandt's spiral staircase (see his '*Philosopher in Contemplation*' and '*Philosopher in Meditation*' in the Louvre), or the cave in Teniers' *Temptation of Saint Anthony*; sixteenth-century Venetian art is whimsical, but not fanciful.

The Descent from the Cross by Rocco Marconi has all the serious qualities, all the unctious of the Gothic artists, along with their quiet symmetry, and a richness of tone and a flowering of colours which fail to extinguish the neighbouring tones. The dead Christ, recalling by his bloodless flesh the matt pallor of the Host, lies gently against the Virgin's breast, supported by a Magdalene of tender and delicate beauty, whose long blonde hair falls in cascades of gold over a magnificent dress of textured damask, of a sombre and opulent purple like that of a ruby. Is your robe soaked in the blood of your beloved Saviour, O Mary Magdalene, or in the heartfelt tears falling from your eyes?

Alessandro Varatori, Il Padavanino, has a Spanish-style *Virgin in Glory*. The Holy Spirit descends in a torrent of light. A warm golden fog fills this canvas which recalls the apotheoses or rather ascensions of Murillo, to avoid employing a profane word when speaking of that most Catholic of painters.

I was not too impressed, despite the great talent he displays, by the vast apocalyptic web of Palma il Giovane's *Triumph of Death*. Saint John, seated on a rock, on Patmos, regards, pen raised and ready to address a scroll, the formidable vision which passes before him: Justice and War ride dark steeds, and Death, mounted on a great pale horse, reaps the human harvest, in the form of sheaves of corpses on either side of the road.

Except for Tintoretto who, with his tawny colours and violent brushwork, can portray terror and tragedy, these lugubrious subjects are generally most unsuited to Venetian painters, whose happy natures reflect the azure of sea and sky, the whiteness of marble and flesh, the gold of hair and brocade, the bright textures of dazzling flowers and fabrics. They cannot maintain a serious style for long, and, behind the fearful mask with which they try to cover their bright cheeks, we hear their stifled laughter emerge from the canvas.

A most interesting painting by Gentile Bellini is his *Procession in St. Mark's Square*, involving the relics kept by the Brotherhood of Saint John the Evangelist, at the moment when the tradesman Jacopo de' Salis prayed before the fragments of the True Cross. One cannot imagine a more complete collection of the costumes of the time; the artist's patient and meticulousness workmanship prevented a single detail being lost. Nothing is sacrificed,

everything is rendered with a Gothic conscientiousness. Each head is a portrait, a portrait resembling a daguerreotype, plus colour.

The depiction of St. Mark's Square as it then was, possesses the accuracy of an architectural plan. Ancient Byzantine mosaics, later replaced, still adorn the portals of the old basilica and, remarkably, the pinnacles are entirely gilded, which in truth they were not, though a painter like Gentile Bellini would never merely have imagined them. The pinnacles were, in fact, to be gilded; but Doge Loredan needed the gold intended for that process to fund his war, and the project was never completed; the only trace left of it is in this painting by the artist, who gilded his Saint Mark's Basilica in anticipation.

A certain miracle involving a relic of the True Cross which fell into the water from the top of a bridge in Venice, the Ponte di Rialto or Ponte San Lorenzo I am not sure which, much occupied the painters of this period; the Accademia contain no less than three important paintings on this curious subject; one by Lazzaro Bastiani, one by Gentile Bellini, and a third by Giovanni Mansueti. These paintings are of the highest interest; they differ in content from the usual subjects of Italian painting, which revolve within the narrow circle of devotion or mythology, and rarely involve the details of real events. These monks of all orders, patricians, common people throwing themselves into the water, swimming, diving, attempting to find the holy crucifix fallen to the floor of the canal, present the strangest scene. On the banks the crowd waits in prayer, to witness the results of the search. In particular a line of ladies kneeling, hands superimposed, adorned with pearls and gems, in short-waisted dresses like those of the Empire style, presents a series of overlapping profiles, with Gothic amiability, finesse, beauty, extraordinary delicacy, and variety: the effect is strange and charming (*see in particular, Gentile Bellini's 'Miracle of the Cross at the Bridge of San Lorenzo'*).

We see, in these paintings, the ancient houses of Venice with their red walls, windows with Lombardic trefoils, terraces topped with pickets, and flared chimneys, the old bridges suspended by chains, and the gondolas of yesteryear, which are not of the form they affect today, they are much less tapered; there is no felze, but a cover stretched over hoops, like those of the river-boats at Saint-Cloud; and none bear that kind of violin-neck of polished iron which serves as a counterweight to the rower placed at the stern.

Nothing is more elegant, more youthfully graceful than the group of paintings in which Vittore Carpaccio depicted the *Legend of Saint Ursula*. Also, the artist in his *Presentation of the Virgin*, (now in the Brera, Milan) within his series *The Marriage of the Virgin*, which is one of the first and perhaps the most delightful of his paintings, has the perfect charm, the adolescent slenderness of Raphael; we cannot imagine more naively adorable attitudes than those of its tilted heads, a more angelic coquetry. There is especially a young boy, with long hair, seen from behind, letting his cape with its velvet collar fall half-over his shoulders, which has a beauty so proud, so youthful, so attractive, that you would think you were seeing a Cupid by Praxiteles dressed in a medieval costume, or rather an angel who possessed the fancy to disguise himself in Venetian magnificence.

I am surprised that Carpaccio's name is not more widely known; he has all the adolescent purity, all the graceful seduction of the painter from Urbino (*Raphael*) in his first manner, and moreover that admirable Venetian use of colour that no other school has been able to attain.

The Giralomo Contarini gallery, the legacy of that amateur patrician of arts, who gave the Museum weapons, statues, vases, carved furniture and others precious items, contains choice works of the Venetian and other schools. I will cite, from among others, the *Supper at Emmaus*, by Marco Marziale, a canvas treated with a meticulous, almost Germanic dryness, where one may note an African attendant draped in a striped multi-hued coat as colourful as a Valencian *capa de muestra*; also Andrea Previtali's *Madonna and Child with Saint John and Saint Catherine*, in which blonde heads are highlighted against a green landscape also glimpsed through the window in the background; Vincenzo Catena's *Madonna and Child with the Infant Saint John*; an almost identical subject by Giovanni Battista Cima, a little too dry and trenchant in its perspective of mountains behind a stretch of water; the *Mystical Marriage of Saint Catherine*, in which Saint Peter and Saint John assist as witnesses, by Francesco Boccacino Cremonense, and in which the Sacred Bride with hair of that reddish gold so dear to the ancient masters, and wearing a beautiful historiated and decorated robe gleams amidst a landscape of sea and mountains of an azure softness; and a *Madonna con Bambino*, by Francesco Bissolo, very soft, very pretty, very fresh, and delicately charming.

The *Four Allegories*, by Giovanni Bellini, is distinguished by singular inventiveness. In the panel showing *Prudence*, a naked woman stands on an altar, accompanied by angels or cupids playing trumpets and a drum. In *Perseverance*, a naked young man, wreath on head, cape over his shoulders, offers a gift to a fleeing warrior; *Fortune* shows a woman holding a globe, her hair braided in the shape of a helmet, aboard a boat, while little cupids play among the waves like Tritons; while *Falsehood*, bearing a snake, emerges from a conch shell carried aloft. I prefer Jacques Callot's etchings to his paintings, which are of more or less doubtful authenticity. There is, in the Pinacoteca Contarini, a fairground scene engraved by the etcher from Nancy, which teems with hordes of bohemians, charlatans, beggars, and rogues, thieving, performing tricks, begging, drinking, and playing cards or dice, an instantaneous view of that picaresque world he knew so well (*see 'The Fair at Impruneta'*); but the brush does not serve the artist so happily as the burin.

Let me end with the jewel, the pearl, the star of this museum: a Madonna with the child Jesus (*Enthroned Madonna adoring the sleeping Christ Child*), by Giovanni Bellini. Here is a well-worn, hackneyed subject, treated a thousand times, yet one which flourishes again in eternal youth beneath the brush of the old master! What is it? A woman holding a child on her knees, but what a woman! That face pursues you like a dream; whoever has seen it once sees it forever; it is of an impossible beauty, yet strangely true to life, of an immaculate virginity yet a penetrating voluptuousness; disdainful and yet infinitely gentle. I seemed, in front of that canvas, to be contemplating a portrait of the unspoken dream surprised in my soul by the artist. Every day I spent an hour of silent adoration at the feet of this celestial idol, and would never have been able to leave Venice, if a young French painter, taking pity on us, had not made me a copy of that beloved face.

## Part XX: The Streets – The Austrian Emperor’s Birthday Celebrations

People rarely speak of the streets of Venice. They exist, however, and in quantity, but the canals and gondolas dominate descriptions of the city due to our unfamiliarity with them. The absence of horses and carriages grants the Venetian streets a unique appearance. Their narrowness is closer to those in the cities of the Near East. As the islets are limited in area, the houses are generally very tall, and the narrow passages that separate them look like saw-cuts in huge blocks of stone. Certain *calles* in Granada and alleyways in London give a fair idea of their nature.

La Frezzaria is one of the liveliest in the city; it is indeed a mere seven or eight feet wide, but corresponds to the Rue de la Paix, in Paris, relatively speaking. It is in this street that the goldsmiths mostly reside who make those slight little chains of gold, thin as a hair, of the type which we call *jaseron*, which are one of the characteristic curiosities of Venice. Except for these chains, and some coarse silver jewellery for the use of country folk, which artists may find picturesque, their shops contain nothing remarkable. Fruiterers offer the more splendid displays; nothing is fresher, better arranged, or more appetising than those piles of reddened peaches like rows of cannonballs in an artillery park; those masses of translucent golden or amber grapes of the richest colours, glowing like precious gems, whose beads, strung as necklaces and bracelets, might adorn, admirably, the neck and arms of some young Maenad of antiquity.

Tomatoes mingle their violent red with those blonde hues, and watermelons, splitting their green sides, show pink wounds. All of these beautiful fruits, brightly lit by the gas, piled on layers of vine leaves, shine wonderfully. One cannot feast the eyes more pleasantly; and often, without being hungry in the slightest, we bought peaches and grapes purely out of love for their colour. I recall also certain displays, laid out by the fishmongers, of small fish so white, so silvery, so pearly, that we longed to swallow them raw, like ichthyophages of the South Seas, for fear of spoiling the taste, and which allowed us to comprehend the barbarity of ancient diners, who viewed moray eels as they died in glass vessels, so as to enjoy the opaline hues with which their agonies stained the sides.

In the evening, these streets provide a most lively and glowing spectacle. The displays are as brightly lit as during the day, and the narrowness of the passage ensures that the light does not dissipate. The fried-food booths and pastry shops, bars, restaurants, and numerous cafes, blaze and seethe with a perpetual to-ing and fro-ing.

Each store, without exception, has its miniature chapel, decorated with a Madonna in front of which lighted lamps or candles, and tubs of real or artificial flowers, are placed. Sometimes a statuette in coloured plaster, sometimes a smoke-darkened painting; sometimes a Greek image with a Byzantine gold background, or a simple modern engraving. For the Italian devotee, the Madonna replaces the ancient Lares, the household gods of the Romans. This cult of the Virgin, a cult both touching and poetic, owns very few schismatics, if any, in Venice, and Voltaireans would be dissatisfied in this respect with ‘the progress of enlightenment’ in the ancient city of the Doges. On well-nigh every street corner, on almost every bridge-

approach a Madonna on an altar is presented in a niche, behind a grille or glass; she is embellished with a crown made of reeds, a necklace of beads, paper-flowers, a lace dress embroidered in silver, and all those pious tinsel decorations with which naive southern faith overloads, in a spirit of childish coquetry, the object of its adoration. Candles and lamps perpetually illuminate these repositories cluttered with votive offerings, hearts of silver, wax legs or female breasts, paintings of shipwrecks scarred by lightning, burned houses, and other disasters in which the miraculous Virgin intervenes. Before these chapels there is always some old woman praying, some young girl kneeling, some sailor making a wish or celebrating having accomplished it, and also sometimes those whose attire proclaims them to belong to a class which, among us, lacks simplicity of belief, and leaves the religion of Christ to the people, and the servants. We found, contrary to our preconceived idea, that Italy is more devout than Spain.

One of these chapels near the Ponte della Paglia, on the Riva degli Schiavoni, still attracts many of the faithful, either because it is on a busy thoroughfare, or because it is awarded some privilege or immunity of which I am ignorant. There are also boxes, here and there, dedicated to souls in purgatory. The small coins thrown into them fund masses for the poor forgotten dead.

After the Frezzaria, the street that leads from Campo San Moisè to Campo Santa Maria Zobenigo is one of those which offer the stranger the most subjects for observation; a lot of alleyways flow from this artery, since it places the banks of the Grand Canal in communication with Piazza San Marco; the shops stay open longer than elsewhere, and, as it is fairly straight, foreigners can traverse it without fear of getting lost, which is quite easy in Venice, where the layout of the streets, complicated by canals and cul-de-sacs, is so tangled that the authorities have been obliged to mark them with a line of stone markers, accompanied here and there by arrows, indicating the route from the Piazza to the landing stage for the railway, located at the other end of the city, near the Scalzi church.

How many times have we not amused ourselves, at night, wandering this maze inextricable to anyone other than a Venetian! After having followed twenty streets, traversed thirty alleys, crossed ten canals, and ascended and descended as many bridges crossed at random beneath the porticos, we often found ourselves back at our starting point. On these excursions, for which we chose moonlit nights, we surprised Venice in her secret aspects, seen from a host of unexpected and picturesque points of view.

Sometimes we came across a grand palazzo half in ruins, outlined in the shadows by a silvery ray of light, making the remaining pieces of glass in its shattered windows gleam, suddenly, like fish-scales or mirrors: sometimes a bridge, tracing its black arc on a perspective of bluish, slightly-misted water, and, further on, a path of red light streaming from a lighted house onto the dark oil of the sleeping canal; at other times a deserted square where the ridge of a church was visible, strangely populated by statues which, in the darkness, took on a spectral appearance, or a tavern where gondoliers and their hangers-on gesticulated like madmen, their silhouettes thrown on the window as in some Chinese shadow play, or even a door half-open onto the water, through which dark figures leapt into a mysterious gondola.

Once, we found ourselves, near the Grand Canal, in a truly sinister alley. Its tall houses, originally plastered in that red which usually colours old Venetian buildings, had a fierce and

truculent appearance. Rain, humidity, neglect, and the absence of light at the bottom of this narrow cutting, had faded the facades little by little, and erased their colour; the vague reddish tint that still stained the walls, looked like the poorly-cleansed aftermath of some crime. Tedium and cold dread oozed from those blood-stained walls; a faded odour of saltpetre and well-water, a smell of mould reminiscent of prison, cloister, or cellar, filled our nostrils. As for the rest, no ray of light, no appearance of life, showed at the blind windows. The low doors, studded with rusty nails, and garnished with iron door-knockers corroded by time, seemed never to be opened; nettles and weeds grew on their thresholds which seemed not to have been trodden by human feet for many a long year. A skinny black dog, that sprang, suddenly, from the shadows like a jack-in-the-box, began a furious and plaintive barking on seeing us, as if unaccustomed to the aspect of man. He followed us for a while, tracing a path around us, like the animal that followed Faust and his assistant Wagner. But staring at him, I said, like Goethe: 'Don't growl, dog! With this holy sound, which I with all my soul embrace, your bestial noise seems out of place.' (See *Faust Part I*; lines 1202-1205) This speech seemed to astonish him, and, finding himself revealed, he disappeared uttering a painful howl. Was it a dog, was it the Devil? That is a matter I prefer to leave deliberately vague.

I very much regret not having the ability of a Hoffmann to render this sinister street the scene of one of those frightening and bizarre tales, like *The Sandman*, *The Desolate House*, or *The Adventures of New Year's Eve*, where alchemists fight over the body of a mannequin and beat it with sweeps of their microscopes amidst a whirlwind of monstrous visions. The bald, wrinkled, grimacing heads, decomposing in perpetual metamorphosis, of Hoffman's characters *Doctor Trabacchio*, *Archivist Lindhorst*, and *Councillor Tusman*, and of scientists like Lazzaro Spallanzani, Antonie von Leeuwenhoek, and Jan Swammerdam, would have suited those black windows perfectly.

If Carlo Gozzi, the author, in his *Memoirs*, of the chapter on *Contrattempi*, who believed himself to be an object of resentment on the part of elves and enchanters, whose tricks he had discovered and whose secrets he betrayed in his magical pieces, had ever traversed this lonely alley, some of those inconceivable mishaps must surely have happened to him which instead seem reserved for that poetic aspect of himself which informs *Turandot*, *The Love of Three Oranges*, and *The Blue Monster*. But Gozzi, who had a feel for the invisible world, would always have avoided this Calle dei Avocatti at twilight.

Returning from one of these fantastic trips, during which the city seemed more deserted than usual, we went to bed in melancholy mood, having endured a battle with a monstrous mosquito, buzzing like a wasp, waving its drum-major's tufted plumes, unfurling its trunk like the god Ganesh, and sawing its wings with the most daring ferocity; a dreadful fight in which we were the underdogs, and whence we emerged riddled with empoisoned bites.

We had just begun to sink into that black ocean of sleep, so akin to death, whom the ancients called death's brother, when, through the wall of our numbness, we heard muffled sounds stirring, a rumble like distant thunder, a muttering of fearful voices. Was it some storm or battle, a cataclysm of nature, a struggle of demons and souls? Such was the question posed to our half-awake minds.

Soon a dizzying clamour tore the veil of our sleep, like a flash of lightning splitting a dark cloud. Cymbals clashed, their brass discs resonating like the crash of armour; tambours and gongs vibrated hollowly beneath frenzied blows; a bass drum roared like a melee of a hundred bulls; tubas and trombones unleashed metallic hurricanes; the cornets chirped desperately; the little flute made desperate efforts, to rise above and dominate this noise; all the instruments were struggling to raise a din. It sounded like a Berlioz Festival adrift, at night, on the water. As this tempest of music passed under our balcony, I thought I heard the bugles of Jericho sounding at once, together with the trumpets of the Last Judgment. A storm of loud bells formed the accompaniment.

The tumult headed towards the Grand Canal, amidst the reddish light of many torches. I found the serenade a little violent, and questioned, complainingly, with all the strength of my heart, whom this enormous nocturnal noise, this colossal hullabaloo was intended for. 'The lover is hardly discreet,' I thought, 'and is not afraid to compromise his beloved. A guitar, a violin, a theorbo would have sufficed, it seems to me.' Then, the noise receding, I was about to return to my slumbers, when a blinding white glare penetrated our closed eyelids, like one of those pale lightning-bolts which the opaqueness of nights cannot shroud, while a fearsome detonation, which made the window-panes dance and shook the house from top to bottom, shattered the silence. I made a three-foot leap, like a carp, in the bed; was this a peal of thunder amidst the room? Was the siege of Venice commencing all over again, without warning? Would a bomb burst through the ceiling in our sleep?

These deafening detonations were repeated every quarter of an hour, until morning, an affront to our windows, and our nerves. They seemed to arise from a location nearby, and each time a livid glare announced their arrival; between the discharges, a deep silence, a silence like death, ensued, apart from those nocturnal murmurs which are like the breathing of sleeping cities. In the midst of this uproar, Venice, struck dumb, seemed to have capsized and drowned in her lagoons. All windows were dark; not a gondola light shone on the matt-black darkness.

Next morning, the answer to the enigma was revealed to us. The city was celebrating the birthday of the Austrian Emperor, Franz Joseph I (*18th of August*). All that bacchanal had taken place in honour of the German Caesar. The batteries of the Giudecca and San Giorgio had dispatched their volleys, and many of the neighbouring windows had been broken. With daylight the noise began again, only more loudly. The frigates fired in alternation with the batteries; the bells clanged from the thousand bell-towers of the city; gunshots from the rank and file crackled over all, at regular intervals. The burnt powder, rising from all sides in large clouds, was incense intended to delight the master's nose, if from the top of his throne in Vienna he happened to turn his head towards the Adriatic. It seemed to me that in these tributes to the emperor there was a certain military ostentatiousness, a certain dual intent in the wealth of fusillades. This birthday compliment involving cannon, served two ends, and it took but little enmity to comprehend them.

We sped to the Piazza. A *Te Deum* was sung in the cathedral. The garrison, in full dress, formed a square in the Piazza, kneeling and rising as their commander ordered, according to the various phases of the divine office. A brilliant array of staff-officers, adorned with gold braid and medals, occupied the centre and glittered proudly in the sunlight; at certain moments,

the guns were raised together, and a fusillade, admirably executed, made white whirlwinds of frightened doves fly into the azure sky. The poor pigeons of St Mark's Square, scared by the tumult, and believing that in defiance of their immunity they were being prepared for slaughter, knew not where to hide; they collided in the air, mad with terror, bumped into the cornices, and fled like wildfire among the domes and chimneys; then, silence being restored, they returned to peck familiarly in their usual places, at the very feet of the soldiers, such is the force of habit.

All this happened without the usual crowds. The Piazza, always so bustling, was deserted. Only a few foreigners hovered, in isolated little groups, beneath the arcades of the Procuracies. The rare spectators who were not foreigners were betrayed by their blond hair, their square faces, their Teutonic origins. No female faces appeared at the windows, and yet the spectacle of fine uniforms worn by handsome officers is appreciated in all countries of the world by the more gracious portion of the human species. Venice, suddenly depopulated, resembled those oriental cities in Arabic tales ravaged through the anger of some magician.

This din punctuating the silence, this agitation amidst emptiness, this immense deployment of forces in complete isolation, possessed something strange, painful, alarming, almost supernatural. This nation that played dead while its joyful oppressors exulted, this city which suppressed itself so as not to witness the triumph, made a deep and unique impression on us. *Non-being* making itself manifest, a menacing muteness, absence as a sign of revolt, form one of those desperate recourses, to which slavery resorts when crushed by despotism. In truth, no universal outcry, no chorus of curses directed against the Emperor of Austria, could have been more effective.

Unable to protest in any other way, Venice had created a vacuum round the celebration, and flattened its solemnity beneath a pneumatic piston.

The artillery fusillades continued all day, while the regiments drilled on the Piazza and the Piazzetta, with ourselves as well-nigh unique spectators. Tired of this monotonous entertainment, we went for our favourite walk along the Riva degli Schiavoni, where a few Greeks and Armenians wandered. Even there our eardrums were still tormented by the cannon fire from the naval frigate anchored in the port. A poor little dog tied, by a piece of rope, to the mast of a vessel from Zante or Corfu, ran scared at each detonation and, mad with fear, fled in a circle as wide as the rope allowed, protesting as best he could against that stupid screeching noise, as if wounded by its sound. We were of the dog's opinion, and, as we were not tied by a cord, we fled to Quintavalle, where we dined under the arbour at Ser Zuane's, at a bearable distance from the odious military uproar.

In the evening, no one entered Caffè Florian! Those who have lived in Venice have only an idea of the immense significance of that little fact. The flower-sellers and caramel-sellers, the tenors, the shadow-puppeteers and even the usual idlers had disappeared. No one on the chairs, no one on the benches, no one under the porticoes; no one even in church, as if it were useless to pray to a God who leaves his people to suffer oppression. I know not if that evening the little candles were lit for the Madonnas at the crossroads.

The musicians of the Austrian reveille played, *in deserto*, a magnificent overture; German music though; a piece by Weber, if I remember correctly!

Not knowing what to do with the tail of this dismal evening, we entered the Apollo Theatre (Teatro Goldoni); the room looked like the interior of a dove-cote. The empty black boxes looked like niches from which the coffins had been removed; a few squads of Hungarians half-filled the bare benches. A dozen German officials, flanked by their wives and children, were trying to replace, and emulate the absent public; but, disregarding the soldiers, the enormous room held no more than fifty spectators. An inadequate troupe, sadly and reluctantly, performed a tasteless translation of a French piece, in front of smoky footlights. A cold sadness, a mortal ennui, from the vault, fell upon one's shoulders like a wet and icy overcoat. The darkened room, face to face with the Austrians, was in mourning for Venice's liberty.

Next day, a sea breeze carried away the odour of powder. The doves, reassured, enacted their snowy evolutions over Saint Mark's Square, and the Venetians, by appointment, all stuffed themselves with ice-cream at Caffè Florian.

## Parts XXI to XXV - Wider Venice

### Contents

Part XXI: The Asylum .....	148
Part XXII: San Biagio – The Capuchin Monks .....	152
Part XXIII: The Churches .....	158
Part XXIV: The Churches continued – The Scuola di San Rocco – Palaces .....	162
Part XXV: The Ghetto – Murano – Vicenza .....	168

### Part XXI: The Asylum

The island of San Servolo lies beyond San Giorgio, in the main lagoon, towards the Lido. The isle is limited in extent, like almost all those which surround Venice, pearls detached from their watery shells. It is almost entirely covered with buildings, and its ancient convent to which succeeded various orders of monks and nuns, has become a hospital for the insane, currently under the direction of the brothers of the Hospitaller Order of Saint John of God, who are particularly dedicated to healing the sick.

When we left the landing-stage at Saint Mark's Square, the wind was contrary; the water of the lagoon usually so calm looked like an ocean, its little wrinkles attempting to become waves; the foam gushed beneath the toothed beak of the gondola, and the water lapped quite loudly against the sides of the boat, driven onward, forcefully, by two vigorous rowers; our little Antonio would not have sufficed to battle the weather alone. We danced about enough for a not too well seasoned stomach to have felt nausea due to seasickness; fortunately, a large number of crossings had made us less sensitive to this, and we quietly admired the skill with which our gondoliers, standing at bow and stern, balanced on their swaying perches.

We could undoubtedly have postponed our visit to another time but, so far, we had only seen Venice in its pink and blue guise, its level waters sparkling in small green wavelets, as in Canaletto's paintings, and did not wish to lose this opportunity of viewing the effect of a strong wind. Certainly, azure is the natural background against which the milky domes of Santa Maria della Salute and the silver helms of Saint-Mark should be displayed, however large masses of greyish clouds, pierced by a few shafts of light, and a sea in glaucous tones, festooned with foam, framing buildings glazed in chill hues, produced a fine English watercolour in the style of Richard Parkes Bonington, William Callow, or William Wyld, who is by no means to be disdained.

This was the sight we viewed when we turned about; opposite was San Servolo, with its reddish bell-tower and its buildings with tiled roofs, half-hidden by the rolling waves; further off lay the low dark line of the Lido, separating the lagoon from the open sea.

Near us, like black-backed swallows skimming the waves, gondolas returning to the city sped past us, fleeing before the weather and pursued by the wind which was set against us.

At last, we arrived at the San Servolo landing-stage, where the sea made our frail boat wobble so much that we had some difficulty getting ashore.

There is nothing very interesting about the interior of the convent-hospice: there are long whitewashed corridors, rooms of chill cleanliness and monotonous uniformity, as in all buildings of this type. It took little labour to convert the monks' cells into housing for the insane. In the chapel, a gilded altarpiece, some smoky blackish canvases that nothing precludes from being Tintoretto's, and that is all. However, it was not as a pretext for descriptions of art and architecture that we visited this Venetian Bedlam.

Madness has always strangely preoccupied me. That a material organ can suffer deterioration and be damaged, that is readily understandable; but that thought, an impalpable abstraction, can be harmed in essence, is barely comprehensible. Brain damage does not explain madness. How is thought affected by that inflamed or softened pulp contained in its casing of bone? In the ordinary course of things, the body dies and the spirit departs; but here the spirit dies and the body remains. Nothing is more sinister or more mysterious. The ship is without a compass, the flame has left the lamp, and the living person no longer possesses a guiding self. Does the soul, obscured by madness, regain its lucidity after death, or are such souls mad for all eternity? Can the soul be neither immaterial nor immortal, since it can become sick and die? Terrible doubts, deep abysses over which we lean trembling, but which attract us like all abysses.

So, it was with an anxious curiosity, mingled with secret terror, that we gazed at those corpses, in whom what remained of the spirit only served to delay putrefaction, edging along the walls, with dull eyes, sagging cheeks, drooping lips, and dragging feet to which the will no longer sends its power, making gestures without reason like damaged animals or machines, insensitive to the burning sun, to the icy rain, no longer possessing a notion of themselves, or believing in others, no longer seeing objects in their true aspect, but rather surrounded by a world of weird hallucinations. How often, troubled by this great insoluble problem, have I visited Charenton, Bicêtre, and other asylums, and been prompted, like Hamlet on contemplating Yorick's empty skull, to search for the crack through which the soul has leaked like water from a vase. But is it not more horrible that here the skull is still alive? How many times have I halted, in a dream, before Wilhelm von Kaulbach's superb psychological engraving (*Das Narrenhaus*), that gripping and painful poem of dementia!

In the corridors, the peacefully insane, who could be allowed to wander without causing danger to themselves or others, crept confusedly about the corridors, beneath greyish hoods, like shapeless molluscs crawling on the walls after rain. They looked at us in a daze, tittering, and attempting a sort of mechanical salute.

Madness, which creates enormous lacunae, does not always thereby suspend all the faculties. Mad people have produced poetry and paintings in which the memory of certain artistic rules has survived the shipwreck of reason. Metre is often quite well-observed in the poetry of the completely demented. Dominikos Theotokopoulos, known as El Greco, whose paintings I admired in the churches and museums of Spain, created mad masterpieces. I saw in England a 'combat between lions and stallions' executed by a madman which he burned into a board with an iron point, red-hot from the fire, and which looked like a sketch by Géricault in bitumen.

One of the insane residents of San Servolo, though he was not an artist by profession, had a mania for painting, and the good brothers of Saint John of God whose principle is not to upset their patients whenever possible, had indulged his fantasies by allowing him a large wall that he had taken pleasure in smearing with the strangest chimeras.

This insane fresco represented a kind of facade of bricks, divided into arcades, the arches of which formed panels where a menagerie of the most frantic extravagance roamed about.

The wildest images in fairground booths that clowns attack with their wands before an astonished crowd; the most fanciful heraldic animals, the most strangely deformed Chinese or Japanese monsters, are beings of dull, bourgeois plausibility in comparison to the creations of that deluded mind. Rabelais' facetious imagination applied to the animal kingdom, or the Apocalypse converted into a menagerie, could alone give some idea of the work.

Add to that the fierce ignorance and truculent barbarism of its execution; there were four-headed eagles here, that would have torn apart, at a blow, the double-headed eagle of the Austrians; crowned lions, red-tongued and toothed like sharks, so fierce in appearance, that they would have made the lion of Saint Mark retreat in fear, along with the blue lion of the Percies of Northumberland; pythons with such complicated coils and such forked darting tongues that all the arrows of Apollo from Eugène Delacroix's ceiling in the Louvre would not have been enough to pierce them; along with formless nameless beasts, the equivalent of which are hardly found other than in the microscopic world, or the diluvian deposits found in caverns.

The artist of this demented fresco firmly believed in the existence of these deformed monsters and claimed to have painted them from nature.

San Servolo contained another singular madman. He was a workman who had lost his reason as the result of an excess of jealous rage. His wife was seduced by a gondolier, and he had, it is said, surprised them together. Whenever the image returned to him, he uttered dreadful cries, rolled on the ground, or bit his arm, severely, believing he was devouring his rival, without the pain warning him that he was staining his mouth with his own blood, and chewing his own flesh.

Only one thing distracted him from his raging mania; the drilling of an artesian well by François Degousée on the island, which lacking water has it brought in from Fusina, from the Brenta canal. He was interested in the progress of the operation and assisted the workers with great skill and energy. When he was content with his efforts, he rewarded himself for his services with a cross of honour, gold or silver paper medals, and braided cords of different colours, which he wore with a most dignified and majestic air, as a diplomat in an ambassador's

salon wears his row of crosses. If he had been lazy, distracted, or clumsy, he chastised himself by removing his badges, and reproached himself, alternately taking a humble or irritated tone, depending on the role he adopted. The monks told us that his judgments were very just, and that he was rigorously severe on himself. Only once had he forgiven himself, being unable to resist the eloquence with which he addressed himself when asking for mercy.

Other madmen were quietly playing boules in a kind of arid garden, surrounded by walls bordering a corner of the island, facing the Lido; two or three were walking with hasty steps, pursued by some fearful hallucination. Another, lean, desiccated, his head bare, remained motionless like a heron at the edge of a marsh, no doubt believing himself to be the bird whose attitude he imitated.

But what impressed me most deeply was a young monk who, leaning against a wall, kept watch over them from afar. His figure remained in my memory, where it has lodged as a model of asceticism. Earlier I had been amazed by those bodies who lived on without a soul; here was a soul before our eyes who lived without a body. The spirit shone alone; mortification having conquered the flesh. The human being had been eclipsed.

His skull, bordered by a crown of hair and shaved above, seemed of a green cadaverous hue. It was as if the mould from the sepulchre had already covered him with its bluish patina; his eyes, intoxicated with faith, shone at the bottom of deeply-bruised sockets, and his hollow cheeks met his chin in twin lines as straight as the sides of a triangle; when he lowered his head, the bones of his vertebrae between the nape of his neck and the hood of his robe protruded, on which that lean spirit of the cloisters could have said his rosary. His slender hands, the colour of yellow wax, were only a network of veins, nerves, and ossicles. Fasting had dissected them alive on the chill table in his cell. His sleeves hung on his wasted arms, like flags from their poles. His habit fell from shoulders to his heels, in a straight line, with a single fold, as stiff as the drapes in a Cimabue or Orcagna painting, not allowing his form to be divined by the least inflection, much like a corpse's shroud or that of a spectre. My frightened gaze sought to find the man under this brown robe; there was only a shadow.

Francisco de Zurbarán's kneeling corpses, with their violet mouths, leaden complexions and eyes drowned in the shadow of their hoods, or the pale phantoms of the Plague in their pallid linen, would have seemed like depictions of Silenus or Falstaff next to this monk of San Servolo; neither the sickly emaciation of the Middle Ages, nor the fierce asceticism of Spanish painting, have ever dared go so far.

Murillo's *Saint Bonaventure* depicted as returning to complete his writings after his death, can alone give an idea of this fearsome face; though Bonaventure is less haggard, less wrinkled, less green in complexion, and more alive, despite having been buried for fifteen days.

I never liked those Rabelaisian monks, short and fat, pot-bellied, eating well, and drinking better; and *Frère Jean des Entommeures* only pleases me in the context of *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. So, this monk delighted me; and I know not what kind of amiable jest regarding choirboys and little girls the Voltaireans would not have dreamed up on his account.

This poor monk was the confessor of madmen. What a terrible and sinister vocation! Listening to the incoherent confessions of those troubled souls, elucidating cases of conscious

delirium, receiving confidences born of hallucination, viewing convulsed masks macerating through wooden grilles, to confess that menagerie amidst stupid laughter, and imbecilic tears! One was no longer surprised by his strange appearance, his skeletal leanness, and his deathly pallor.

How did he go about introducing the idea of God to the harpings of dementia, to garrulous idiocy? What can he say to those unfortunate people, who no longer possess a soul, no longer enjoy freedom, and who cannot sin or be anything but innocent of all crimes?

Does he set the fiery braziers of hell before their poor deranged imaginations, to contain depraved fantasies through sheer terror? Or does he open to their hopes some childish paradise far beyond the sea, its lawns dotted with flowers, where white deer graze, where peacocks trail their starry tails, where rivers of cream flow from meringue rockeries; a heaven of pastries and preserves?

During our visit the weather had calmed, so we resolved to take advantage of what remained of the day to visit the Lido. There are, on the Lido, a few drinking places where working people go to dine and dance on feast days. It is scarcely dry land; however, some trees survive, and meagre tufts of grass make unsuccessful attempts at imitating turf; but good intention must make do instead, and feet that slip all week on the paving slabs of Venice are not sorry to sink up to the ankle in the shifting sands that the sea piles up there. One can imagine, thus, that one is walking on firm ground.

As we were there during the working week, the Lido was deserted and not very cheerful in appearance. But a tumult of popular joy would have bothered us at that moment, and the solitude of the arid shore suited the serious nature of our thoughts. We were walking the beach where the great Byron had galloped his horses, and where the Venetians came to bathe in groups. The beautiful compatriots of Titian and Paolo Veronese sheltered there, to undress, behind frail sheets of canvas supported by sticks; because the cabins on wheels of Dieppe and Biarritz had, fortunately, not penetrated so far.

As the weather was uncertain, we eschewed any anacreontic encounters and, boarding our gondola, returned to Saint Mark's Square, where, after hearing the musical reveille, we retired to our own Campo San Moisè, to enjoy a restless sleep, in which the monk of San Servolo, the figures of madmen and monsters, and those fantastic elements of fresco, combined to create a dark and extravagant nightmare as in some novel by Monk Lewis or Charles Maturin.

## **Part XXII: San Biagio – The Capuchin Monks**

Everyone, at least once in their life, has been obsessed with a musical motif, a fragment of poetry, a scrap of conversation, overheard by chance, which pursues you everywhere with an invisible ghostly obstinacy. A monotonous voice whispers in your ear the cursed theme, a silent orchestra plays it in the depths of your mind, your pillow repeats it to you, your dreams whisper it, an invincible power forces you to mumble it imbecilically from morning to evening, as the devotee mutters their litany in sleep.

For eight days, a poem by Alfred de Musset, doubtless imitated from some old Venetian popular song, fluttered madly on my lips, and chirped away like a little bird, without my being able to put it to flight. Despite myself, I hummed it under my breath in the most disparate situations:

*At San Biagio, on the Zueca,  
You were happy, very happy.*

*At San Biagio.*

*At San Biagio, on the Zueca,  
We were fine there.*

*Just take the trouble*

*To remember,*

*Take the trouble*

*And you'll recall.*

*At San Biagio, on the Zueca,*

*Gathering vervain in the meadow:*

*At San Biagio, on the Zueca,*

*To live and die there.*

The Zueca (an abbreviation for the Giudecca) was facing us, separated only by the width of the channel, and nothing was easier than going to the San Biagio of the song, which conjures up an island of Cythera, a languorous Eldorado, an earthly paradise of love, where it would be sweet to live and die. A few strokes of the oars would have borne us there; but the temptation was resisted, knowing that one must not approach enchanted shores if one does not wish to see the mirage melt into vapour, and I continued to hum the unbearable refrain:

*At San Biagio, on the Zueca*

which was beginning to become what they call a *saw* in workshop slang; a *saw* with sharp teeth, though without any ill intent on my side. My travelling companion, my dear Louis (*Louis de Cormenin*), who had tolerated this cantilena, importunate as a mosquito's buzz, for more than eight days with that charming placidity, and that imperceptible smile of irony which gives his Berber-bearded head so fine and sympathetic an expression, being unable to contain himself any longer, declared his authority one morning, by setting foot in the gondola, and telling young

Antonio: 'To San Biagio, to the Zueca!' To my disgust, he made me sail to the heart of my dream, and my refrain; an excellent homoeopathic remedy.

We found no meadows at San Biagio, and were unable, to my great regret, to gather vervain. Around the church there are cultivated areas, market gardens where vegetables replace flowers. My disappointment did not prevent me from admiring the most beautiful grapes and superb pumpkins. It is probable that at the time when the song was created the summit of the island was occupied by wasteland, including fresh grass scattered with flowers in the spring, and where loving couples walked, hand in hand, gazing at the moon. An ancient Venetian guide-book describes the Zueca as a place full of gardens, orchards, and delightful corners.

Instead of finding pretty flowers, in tender colours, with penetrating scents, blooming amidst the grass, encountering yellowing pot-bellied pumpkins beneath spreading leaves calms one's poetic enthusiasm, and, from that moment, I no longer sang: '*At San Biagio, on the Zueca.*'

To employ our time there, we went, along the island, to the Church of the Most Holy Redeemer (*Il Redentore*), located near the Capuchin monastery.

The church possesses one of those beautiful Greek style facades of such elegant and harmonious proportions as Palladio once created. This kind of architecture is very popular with people of taste. It is sober, pure, and classical. Though I will be accused of barbarism, I admit to finding it only moderately charming. I scarcely accept, for Catholic churches, anything other than the Byzantine, Romanesque or Gothic styles. Greek art is so associated with polytheism that it can barely express any other thought. Also, churches built according to its plan in no way possess the religious stamp, in the sense that I attach to the phrase; that luminous ancient serenity, with its perfect rhythm, and its logic of forms, cannot render the vague, infinite, deep, mysterious meaning of Christianity. The unalterable cheerfulness of paganism cannot express incurable Christian melancholy, and Greek architecture is therefore suitable for temples, palaces, stock-exchanges, ballrooms, and galleries, more or less ornate, where Jupiter might be at ease, but where Christ has difficulty finding a lodging.

Once resigned to its style, the Church of the Redeemer strike quite a beautiful figure at the edge of the canal, in which it is reflected, along with its large monumental staircase of seventeen marble steps, its triangular pediment, its Corinthian columns, its bronze doors and its statues, its two pyramidions and its white dome, which produces such a beautiful effect at sunset, when one journeys offshore in a gondola, between the public gardens and San Giorgio.

The church was built to fulfil a vow made by the Senate in order to ward off the plague of 1576, which caused such terrible mortality in the city, and bore away, among other illustrious figures, Titian, that patriarch of painting, loaded with years and glory.

The interior is very simple, even a little bare. Either because money was lacking, or for some other reason, the statues which appear to fill the niches along the nave are nothing but trompe-l'oeil work skilfully executed in grisaille by Paolo Piazza, a Capuchin priest. The niches are real; but the statues, painted on wooden boards, betray their secret by their lack of depth when seen in profile, though from the front the illusion is complete. This same Padre Piazza created, in the refectory of the convent, a painting which he had the whim of signing

with the letter P five times, which is interpreted as follows: Paolo Piazza Per Poco Prezzo (*Paolo Piazza, for little reward*) he was doubtless badly paid for his labour, and took his revenge in this manner.

A for the paintings, we would need to commence with the usual litany, Tintoretto, the Bassanos, Paolo Veronese; I lack the pretension to describe them to you one after another. There is such an abundance of fine pictures in Venice that one almost ends by being deterred, in the belief that at that time it was no more difficult to create a superb church painting than to scribble a newspaper article with a flourish of the pen is today. However I recommend to the traveller a Giovanni Bellini of supreme beauty, which adorns the sacristy.

The subject is the Blessed Virgin and the child Jesus between Saint Jerome and Saint Francis. The divine Mother looks with an air of deep adoration on the infant sleeping in her lap. Little smiling angels flutter in the background, above a sea, playing on lutes. We know with what delicacy, what flowering of feeling, what innocence of spirit, Giovanni Bellini treats his familiar scenarios with the brush; but here, apart from the naive charm of the composition, the Gothic fidelity of the drawing, the somewhat severe finesse of the modelling, there is a burst of colour, a light warmth of tone which suggests Giorgione. Though some connoisseurs attribute this painting to Palma Vecchio, I believe it to be a Bellini; the unusual brilliance of colour arises from the perfect state of conservation of the painting. Venice is so naturally a colourist that grey is impossible there, even for artists, and the most severe Gothic gilds its asceticism with a Giorgionesque amber hue.

Two or three Capuchin monks who were at prayer would have granted this church, if it had been illuminated with a more miserly light, the air of one of those paintings by François Granet so admired twenty years ago; the good fathers were perfectly posed, and all they were missing was a touch of bright red in the ears. One of them was humbly sweeping the choir, and we asked to see the monastery; he acceded with great politeness to our request and allowed us to enter via a small side-door in the church cloister. I had long harboured the desire to view the interior of an active monastery.

In Spain, we had been unable to satisfy this desire for the religious and picturesque. The monks had recently been secularised, and the monasteries, as in France after the Revolution, had become national property. I had walked through the Charterhouse of Miraflores, near Burgos, where we had found only a poor old man, dressed in blackened clothes somewhere between the costume of a peasant and that of a priest, smoking his cigarette beside a brazier, who guided us along the deserted corridors and abandoned cloisters, onto which the empty cells opened. At Toledo, the monastery of San Juan de los Reyes, an admirable building in ruins, contained only a few shy lizards and furtive snakes, which vanished at the sound of our footsteps under the nettles and rubble. The refectory was still almost intact, and, above the door, a terrible painting showed a rotting corpse, whose green belly released, amidst its effusions, the filthy guests of the sepulchre; the intention of the work was to offset the sensuality of the meal, served however with eremitic austerity. The Charterhouse of Granada contained only turtles which flapped heavily into the water from the banks of the fishponds as the visitor approached, while the magnificent Monastery of San Domingo, on the slopes of

Antequera, listened, in deepest solitude, to the babbling of its fountains, and the rustling of its laurel grove.

The Capuchin monastery of the Zueca barely resembled those admirable buildings, which possessed long white marble cloisters with elegantly formed arches, marvels of the Middle Ages or the Renaissance; their courtyards planted with jasmines, myrtles and oleanders; their gushing fountains; their cells revealing through a window the blue velvet of the Sierra Nevada iced with silver. It was not one of those splendid retreats where austerity is but one more charm for the soul, and to which the philosopher could adapt as easily as the Christian. The cloister was not relieved by any mark of architectural ornamentation; low arches, short pillars, a prison courtyard rather than a place to walk and daydream. An ugly roof with garish red tiles covered the whole. Not even a severe, sad bareness, those cold grey tones, that pallid sobriety favourable to thought; a harsh flickering light crudely illuminated its miserable details, and highlighted its prosaic, mundane wretchedness. In the garden which we could glimpse from there, stood rows of cabbages and other vegetables of a bitter green colour. Not a shrub, not a flower: everything was sacrificed to strict utility.

We then entered the interior of the convent, traversing corridors intersecting at right angles; at the end of these corridors, there were small chapels built into the wall and coloured with crude frescoes in honour of the Madonna or some saint of the Order.

The leaded windows with their mesh of glazing granted them some daylight, but without producing those chiaroscuro effects of which painters know how to take such good advantage. One would have said that in their construction everything had been calculated to produce as much ugliness as possible in the smallest space. Here and there, hung engravings glued on canvas, representing, in an infinity of small medallions, all the saints, all the cardinals, all the prelates, all the illustrious characters produced by the Order, a sort of genealogical tree of that impersonal and constantly renewed family.

Low doors darkened at regular intervals the long white lines of the walls. On each of them could be read a religious thought, a prayer, or one of these brief Latin maxims which contain a world of ideas. To the inscription was joined an image of the Virgin, or the portrait of a saint, the object of devotion particular to the cell's inhabitant.

A vast tiled roof, supported by a visible wooden framework, covered, without touching, the alveoli of these monastic bees, like a lid placed on rows of boxes.

The sound of a bell was heard, indicating either a mealtime, prayers, or some other ascetic exercise; the cell doors opened, and the deserted corridors were all at once filled with a swarm of monks who set off two by two, heads lowered, broad beards spreading across their chests, hands crossed in their sleeves, towards the part of the convent to which the summons called them. When they lifted their feet, their sandals on leaving the heel, made a sort of clicking sound, most monastic and lugubrious in nature, which gave a sad rhythm to their spectral march.

About forty of them passed before us, and we saw only their heavy, dazed, stupid heads, characterless despite their beards and shaved pates. Ah! How different to the monk of San Servolo, so consumed by ardour, so scorched by faith, so ravaged by macerations, whose

feverish eye was already shining with the light of the other life, ecstatically confessing the delirious! A Daniel amidst the lions!

We had certainly entered the monastery disposed to be if not pious, at least respectful. If we lack faith, we still admire it in others, and if we cannot believe, at least we can understand. We had prepared ourselves to feel all the austere poetry of the cloister, and were most cruelly disappointed.

The convent felt like a hospital, an asylum, a barracks. The uncivilised odour of this human menagerie caught us in the face and sickened us. If one might say of various holy personages that they were possessed by the madness of the cross, *stultitiam crucis*, it seemed to me that these monks were possessed by its idiocy; and, despite myself, my spirit rebelled, and I blushed for the deity on viewing such degradation of the creature made in his image. I felt ashamed that a hundred men had gathered in a single place, to be filthy and to stink, according to some set of rules, in honour of one who created eighty thousand species of flowers. This nauseating incense revolted me, and I felt, for these poor Capuchin fathers, an involuntary and secret horror.

I even viewed myself, I, a named subscriber to *Le Constitutionnel*, the owner of busts of Jean Jacques Rousseau and Voltaire in terracotta, the bearer of a Touquet snuffbox, a liberal of the Restoration, in the most humiliating light you could imagine; I indulged, for my part, in imbecilic thoughts of the form: ‘Would it not be better if these robust fellows, made for the plough, threw away their habits, re-entered human life and achieved their salvation while working, instead of eschewing shirts and dragging their sandals about the cloister, in a state of idleness and stupidity?’

As we left the convent, two of the fathers who had business in Venice asked us to take them across the Giudecca canal, in our gondola. Out of humility, they declined to accept the place of honour under the felze that we offered them, and stood near the bow; they struck a good enough pose thus; their brown homespun robes formed two or three large folds that Fra Bartolomeo would not have disdained to use in painting the habit of Saint Francis of Assisi. Their bare feet in their sandals were very fine; the digits splayed, the toes as long as those in the feet of ancient statues.

We gave them a few twenty-kreuzter coins to say Mass for us. The Voltairean ideas which we had harboured throughout the time of our visit had rightly deserved this Christian submission on our part, and if it was the devil who had aroused them, he had to be trapped, and forced to gnaw his tail like an angry monkey.

The good priests took the money, slipped it into the folds of their sleeves, and, finding us such good Catholics, gave us some small intaglio images that we have carefully preserved: ‘Saint’ Moses, the ‘prophet’; Saint Francis, some other bearded saints, and a certain Veronica Giuliani, a Capuchin abbess (*abadessa cappuccina*) whose head was shown falling back, her eyes swimming in ecstasy like those of Saint Teresa the Spanish nun, who pitied the devil for not being able to love, yet was not placed on the Index as I was for an idea of the same nature.

We dropped off the good fathers at the landing-place of San Moisè, and they swiftly vanished into the narrow streets.

The day was not conducive to illusions: at San Biagio, on the Zueca, pumpkins had replaced vervain, and where we expected to find a savage cloister with livid monks, in the manner of Zurbaran, we had encountered a vile Capuchin barracks, and garb like that in Jakob Schlesinger's coloured lithographs. This disappointment felt particularly cruel to me; since for many a year I had cherished the dream of ending my days in a monk's robe in some beautiful monastery in Italy or Portugal, say Montecassino or Mafra, and now I no longer desired that at all.

### **Part XXIII: The Churches**

With the exception of Saint Mark's Basilica, a marvel whose only analogues are the mosque of Constantinople, and the mosque of Cordoba, the churches of Venice are not particularly remarkable as regards architecture, or at least possess nothing to amaze the traveller who has visited the cathedrals of France, Spain and Belgium. Except a few of little interest, of earlier date, they all belong to the Renaissance and the Rococo genre, which in Italy swiftly followed the return to the classical tradition. The best, are in the Palladian style; the worst, in a peculiar genre that we will call the Jesuit style. Almost all the old churches in the city have unfortunately been refashioned under one or other of these influences. Certainly, Palladio, as so many noble buildings demonstrate, was an architect of superior merit; but he lacked any feeling for Catholicism, and was more suited to rebuilding the temple of Diana at Ephesus, or that of the Panhellenic Jupiter at Aegina, than to raising the Basilica of the Nazarene or some martyr of the *Golden Legend*. He sipped, like a bee, the pollen of Hymettus, and ignored in his flight the flowers of the Passion. As for Jesuit taste, with its gibbous domes, its swollen columns, its over-heavy balustrades, its convoluted scrolls like *Joseph Prudhomme's* signature, its puffy cherubim, its emasculated angels, its napkin-ring cartouches which seem to be waiting for their beards to be shaved, its chicory leaves as big as cabbages, its unhealthy affectations and ardent ornamentation, which one might take for excrescences of unhealthy stone, I profess an insurmountable horror of it all. It does more than displease me, it disgusts me.

In my opinion, nothing is more opposed to the Christian idea than that vile jumble of pious trinkets, that excess without beauty, without grace, overloaded and heavy, a uniform excess, which turns the chapel of the Most Holy Virgin into an Opéra girl's boudoir. The Chiesa degli Scalzi is of this type, an example of rich extravagance; its walls, inlaid with coloured marble, forming an immense dappled surround woven in white and green; its ceilings frescoed by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo and Gregorio Lazzarini, in cheerful, bright, clear tones, the pink and azure of which would be wonderfully suited to a ballroom or theatre. It must have been charming, when full of little powdered abbots and beautiful ladies, in the days of Casanova and Cardinal de Bernis (see *Casanova's 'History of My Life'*), during a Mass to the music of Nicola Porpora, with the violins and choir of La Fenice. Indeed, nothing would be more natural in such a place than to celebrate the Lord to the sound of a gavotte. How I prefer the low Romanesque arches, the short porphyry pillars with ancient capitals, the barbarous images

which stand forth from the golden shimmer of the Byzantine mosaics, even more the long ribs, tapered columns, and pierced trefoils, of Gothic cathedrals!

These architectural defects, to which we must resign ourselves in Italy, because almost all the churches are built more or less in this style, are compensated for by the number and beauty of the works of art the buildings contain. If one fails to admire the setting, one is forced to admire the gems. These are none other than paintings by Titian, Paolo Veronese, Tintoretto, Palma Vecchio and Palma il Giovane, Giovanni Bellini, Allessandro Scalzi, Bonifazio Veronese, and other wonderful masters. Each chapel has its gallery, which would honour a king. Even the Scalzi church itself, once its style is accepted, offers remarkable details: its wide altar-steps covered in Verona brocade, the beautiful twisted columns in French red marble, the gigantic statues of prophets, the jasper balustrades, the mosaic panels, have a certain style and are not lacking in grandeur. The church contains a very beautiful painting by Giovanni Bellini, a *Virgin and Child*; a magnificent bronze bas-relief by Jacopo Sansovino, representing episodes from the life of Saint Sebastian; and a delightful group in less severe style, by Guiseppe Toreto, Canova's master, namely a *Holy Family*, Saint Joseph, the Virgin and the Child Jesus. The Virgin has a fine, plump face, a coquettish tilt of the head and extremities all of aristocratic delicacy. She looks like a duchess at the court of Louis XV, and one sees in her none other than Madame Pompadour. Angels from the ballet, students of François Robert Marcel, accompany this lovely domestic grouping. It is not religious, certainly; but this mannered and spiritual grace has much charm, and this sculptor of decadence is yet another fine artist.

The church of San Sebastiano, built by Sebastiano Serlio, is somewhat of a gallery and pantheon dedicated to Paolo Veronese. He worked there for years, and rests there for eternity surrounded by a halo of his masterpieces. His tomb is there surmounted by his bust, with a shield depicting his coat of arms, three stems of clover on a field we could not distinguish; let us admire the *Saint Sebastian* of Titian, what a beautiful old man's head, what a superb and masterful bearing, and how pretty and naïve the attitude of the child who holds the saintly bishop's mitre! but let us move on quickly to reach the master of this site, the great Paolo Veronese. In the *Crucifixion*, the three Marys at the foot of the cross are notable for the magnificent sense of order, the complex feeling for breadth, of a painter whom no one has equalled in the art of filling the voids of these vast canvases. Brocades, and damasks break into opulent folds, undulate in splendid combinations, and Christ, from the top of the tree of sorrows, cannot withhold a vague half-smile, as if the joy of being so well-depicted consoles him for his suffering. Mary Magdalene is adorably beautiful; her large eyes are drowned in light and tears; a teardrop still hangs trembling next to her purpurin mouth, like a droplet of rain on a rose petal. The background of the landscape is unfortunately a little too like theatre decoration, and its poor layout toys with and confuses the eye; his *Presentation of Jesus in the Temple* is also a very remarkable painting, despite the exaggerated limbs of the figures placed at the front of the composition; but the head of Saint Simeon is of divine unction and marvellous execution, and the Child Jesus presents himself through an astonishingly audacious use of foreshortening.

In the right-hand corner of the painting, a dog, its melancholy muzzle raised in the air, seems to bark at the moon. Nothing justifies the presence of this isolated creature; but we know

Paul Veronese's predilection for dogs, especially greyhounds; he placed them in all his paintings, and the San Sebastiano church contains the only canvas which does not contain one, which is noted as a unique curiosity amongst the works of this master. I was unable to verify for myself the accuracy of the assertion; but on reflection, it seems that the art of Paul Veronese always presents itself to my memory accompanied by a white greyhound, just as a canvas of Il Garofalo (*Benvenuto Tisi*) appears invariably flowered and signed with a carnation. Some amateur, with time available, should ascertain the truth of the claim regarding this characteristic detail.

The purest of these picturesque diamonds is his *Saint Mark and Saint Marcellinus Being Led to Martyrdom*. Art can scarcely be taken further, and the painting must take its place among the seven wonders of human genius.

What colour and what sense of design in the group of two women, each with a child, whom the eye first encounters when penetrating the canvas! What ineffable unction, what celestial resignation on the faces of the two saints already bright with their future haloes, and how charming that woman's head which appears in three-quarter view below Saint Sebastian's shoulder, young, blonde, driven by emotion, eyes full of sadness and solicitude! This head, which is all we see of the figure, is of an attitude so precise, of a design so perfect, that the rest of her body can easily be imagined behind the interposed figures that hide her; we can follow its invisible lines to the end, the anatomy being so exact.

Saint Sebastian is said to be a portrait of Paolo Veronese himself, and the young girl that of his wife. They were then both in the prime of life, and she had not yet acquired the ample and heavy matronly beauty which characterises her in the portraits of her that remain, among others that in the gallery of the Pitti Palace, in Florence. Fabrics, details, ornamentation, everything is finished with the extreme care, the conscientious finish of supreme works, where the artist works simply to exercise his genius and satisfy the desire of his heart. It is in the depths of this canvas that the painter lies buried. Never did a brighter lamp illuminate the shadow of a tomb, and the masterpiece shines above the coffer like the blaze of an apotheosis.

The *Coronation of the Virgin* takes place amidst iridescence, effusions, and scintillations of light that only ever existed on Paolo Veronese's palette. In an atmosphere of molten gold and silver which traverses Christ's hair, a Mary of such celestially human beauty that she makes your heart race, while making you bow your head, floats on a cloud. His *Esther Crowned by Ahasuerus* is of an unparalleled grandeur and opulence of tone. Here Paolo Veronese was able to display his sumptuous manner at ease; the pearls, satins, velvets, and gold brocades sparkle, shimmer, gleam and fragment in shivers of light. What a masculine and proud appearance the warrior in the foreground has, clad in the nonchalant anachronism of his armour! And how the great sacramental dog boldly camps there, as if acknowledging its breeding, and feeling the honour of being painted by Paolo Veronese! Die of envy, Louis Godefroy Jadin, portraitist of such creatures!

At the end of the church, in a location almost invisible from below, there are large grisailles from the master's hand, very lightly worked and beautifully designed; humidity, weather, and neglect has begun to mar them; an Austrian bomb, piercing the vault, has scored them with a furrow.

The sacristy still contains paintings by him, which date from his early youth, when his as yet timid genius was searching out its way. Legend provides several explanations for the prodigious abundance of Paolo Veronese paintings in this church: first a particular devotion of the artist to Saint Sebastian; then, more romantically, the murder of a rival which forced him to seek asylum in that place of refuge which he embellished in gratitude while at leisure there. According to others, it was to avoid the revenge of a senator whom he had caricatured in Saint Mark's Square, meaning that the painter had to remain hidden in San Sebastian for two years. We give these tales told by the sacristan for what they are worth, without troubling to examine them further.

Before leaving this radiant church, whose riches I am far from having described, lower your eyes, dazed by phosphorescent ceilings, to the grey pavement beneath, and you will discover at your feet a humble stone which hides the vault of a dynasty of gondoliers. The first name recorded is Zorzi de Cataro, from the San Barnaba landing-stage, with the date 1503. The last bears the date 1785. The republic did not long survive the Zorzi.

Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari is not in the dreadful, classic Jesuit style that I spoke of earlier; its ogives, lancets, Roman tower, and large red brick walls give it a more religious feel. Above the door there is a statue by Alessandro Vittoria, representing the Saviour. The Church of the Frari, built by Nicolas Pisano, dates back to 1250.

It is here that the tomb of Canova is located: this monument that the artist had intended for Titian, modified to some degree, served for himself. I admired it only moderately; it is pretentious, theatrical and cold. At the base of a green marble pyramid attached to the wall of a chapel, yawns the black door of a vault, towards which a tiered procession of statues is ascending, via the steps of the monument: at the head walks a funereal male figure carrying a sepulchral urn; behind allegorical figures advance holding torches and flower garlands. To counterbalance this right side of the composition, a large naked figure, which, doubtless, symbolizes the fragility of life, leans on an extinguished torch, and the winged lion of Saint Mark sadly lowers his muzzle on his paws, in a pose similar to the famous lion by Bertel Thorwaldsen. Above the door, two winged spirits support a medallion portrait of Canova.

The tomb seems all the poorer and meaner as regards idea and execution, in that the Frari is full of ancient monuments in the most beautiful style, achieving the most beautiful effects. Here rest Bishop Marco Zeno (*d. 1641*) Alvise Pasqualigo (*Procurator of San Marco, d.1528*), Francesco Barbaro (*Humanist and Senator d.1454*), Jacopo Marcello (*Naval Commander d.1484*), and Benedetto Pésaro (*Naval Commander, d.1503*), in sarcophagi adorned with statues in wondrously proud attitudes.

There is an admirable triptych, here, by Bartolomeo Vivarini dated to 1474, and a Titian *Virgin* who is draped in a white veil to charming effect. The equestrian statue of Bartolomeo Colleoni, grandly mounted on his bronze steed, arrests the gaze on arriving by canal at the small square at the end of which rises the Basilica dei Santi Giovanni e Paolo. Though its construction dates back to the thirteenth or fourteenth century, it was only consecrated in 1430. The tympanum of the facade is pretty, the arch which surmounts it is wonderfully carved with flowers and fruit. We visited the church mainly to see Titian's *Martyrdom of Saint Peter*; a painting so precious that its sale is forbidden under penalty of death (*later destroyed by fire in*

1867, a copy by Johann Loth now hangs in its place). I love the ferocious artistry, and this is the only case where a scene of capital punishment is worth preserving. However, despite its beauty, other works of Titian seem as worthy as this one of so great a jealousy on the part of Venice, and we had formed, from copies and engravings, a concept of it different from and superior to the reality. The scene takes place in a wood; Saint Peter is overthrown, the executioner holds him by the arm and already raises his sword; a priest flees in terror, and in heaven two cherubic angels appear, ready to collect the soul of the martyr. The executioner is firmly planted; his aggressive, threatening stance is well done. A bestially energetic expression contracts his features. His eyes shine beneath his low forehead like those of a tiger. His nostrils dilate and he smells blood. But there is perhaps too much fear and not enough resignation in the head of the saint. He sees only the sword whose chill blade is about to pass between his vertebrae, and he forgets that above, in the azure, hover celestial messengers with palm fronds and crowns. He is too much the ordinary condemned person whose head is about to be severed, and fears the pain. As the monk on the left, he is fearful, tense from terror, but unable to escape. His body, in foreshortening, extends long legs, thrown back in the act of running. His arms are stretched out to the left, his head to the right.

Though the composition may give rise to criticism, one can only bow before the magnificent landscape, so grand, so severe, so stylish; the simple, masculine, and robust use of colour, the broad and grandiose action, the impassive sovereignty of touch, the haughty mastery, which reveals the god of painting. Titian, as I have already said, is the only artist that the modern world can compare to the ancient, in terms of calm strength, tranquil splendour, and endless serenity.

I could tell you more regarding the funeral monuments which line the walls; the altar of the Chapel of San Domenico, where the history of that saint is modelled in a series of bas-reliefs in bronze, by Guiseppe Maria Mazza of Bologna; the *Christ on the Cross* by Tintoretto (*removed to the Accademia*); the magnificent sculptures of the Capella del Rosario; and the *Coronation of the Virgin*, by Palma Vecchio; but, in a church where there is a Titian, we only see Titian. His sun quenches all the stars.

## **Part XXIV: The Churches continued – The Scuola di San Rocco – Palaces**

San Francesco della Vigne, with its red and white bell tower, is also worth visiting. Near the church there is a strange cloister, enclosed with black wooden grilles, which surrounds a kind of courtyard cluttered with wild mallows, nettles, hemlocks, asphodels, burdocks and other plants of ruins and cemeteries, in the middle of which rises a cave made of rockery and coral, quite similar to those little rocks adorned with shells that are sold in Le Havre and Dieppe. This cave houses an effigy of Saint Francis in wood or coloured plaster, a devotional toy, a piece of Jesuit Chinoiserie. Under the damp mossy arches of the cloister, in the midst of tombs worn by friction their inscriptions already illegible, we noticed on a stone slab a gondola carved in somewhat coarse relief, but still quite visible. It covers a vault of gondoliers, like the tomb of

the Zorzi of Cataro in the church of San Sebastiano; every family of gondoliers had its burial vault.

In the church, we saw a painting by Antonio Falier da Negroponte, of remarkable beauty and very well-preserved (*Madonna and Child Enthroned*). It is the only work of this painter I have ever encountered, one whose name I had never heard spoken, but who nonetheless deserves to be known.

I will give a fairly detailed description. The Virgin, seated on a throne, dressed in a robe of green and gold brocade and an embroidered mantle of the most delicate finish, one side of which a little girl supports in an attitude of ingenuous devotion, looks lovingly at the Child Jesus placed crosswise on her knees. The head of this Virgin, of exquisite delicacy, would do honour to Giovanni Bellini, Carpaccio, Perugino, Dürer, or the sweetest and purest of the Gothic masters. She is blonde, and the gold of her hair, treated strand by strand, blends with the splendour of a trefoiled halo, inlaid with precious stones in the Byzantine style; at the top of the painting, from the depths of a naive ultramarine paradise, the Eternal Father in a majestic and satisfied pose looks down on the sacred group; two beautiful angels are holding an arch of flowers, and behind the throne, inlaid with goldwork and enamel, like that of an empress of the Later Empire, roses and lilies bloom, arranged in covered niches, which recall the flowery appellations of the litany.

All this is treated with that religious meticulousness, that infinite patience which seems to take no account of time and which exploits the endless leisure of the cloister. Indeed, Negroponte was a monk, as the scroll traced on the painting declares: *Frater Antonius di Negroponto pinxit*. But extreme attention to detail takes nothing away from the grandeur of the work, its imposing effect, and the richness of colour which contrasts, victoriously, with the gleam of gold and embossed ornaments. It is both an image and a gem, as to my mind paintings should be that are exposed to the adoration of the faithful. Art, in such circumstances, benefits from adopting the hieratic and mysterious role of the idol. The Madonna of Brother Antonio da Negroponte in San Francesco della Vigna fulfils these conditions admirably and supports with honour the neighbouring *Resurrection* by Paolo Veronese, the *Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence* by Girolamo da Santacroce, and the *Madonna and Child with Saints* by Giovanni Bellini, one of his best works, unfortunately placed in a dark chapel.

We must not neglect a visit to San Pantaleone, if only for the gigantic ceiling painting by Gian Antonio Fumiani, representing various episodes from the life of the saint, his martyrdom, and his apotheosis. Since the monastic stiffness and naivety of missal illumination, as seen in the work of Brother Antonio da Negroponte, many years have passed, and art has travelled far. Why does this ceiling, however, which equals in bold facility that of the Salon of Hercules at Versailles, by François Lemoyne, and the frescoes in the Escorial, by Luca Giordano, leave one cold despite its artistic foreshortenings, its use of trompe-l'oeil, all its resources and cleverness of execution? It is because the means are everything, the hand is ahead of the head, and there is a lack of soul in this immense composition, suspended above one's head, like an opera Glory, by visible threads. The driest, clumsiest, most constrained Gothic has a charm lacking in these great mannerists so learned, so nimble, so skilful, and so expeditious in practice.

In the church of Santa Maria della Salute, depicted in the magnificent exterior view that Canaletto painted and that everyone can see in the Louvre, we admired a superb ceiling painting by Titian, showing Cain's murder of Abel, executed with masterful robustness and energy: it is both calm and violent like all the most successful works of that unrivalled artist. The architecture is by Baldassarre Longhena; the white domes are very gracefully curved, and stand out against the azure like breasts full of milk; a hundred and thirty statues with flying draperies, in elegantly styled poses, populate the cornice; a very pretty Eve, in the costume of her day, smiled at us every morning from this cornice, when we were staying at the Hotel Europa, beneath a pink ray of sunlight, which dyed her marble with a blush of modesty. Religion is not severe in Italy, where nudity sanctified by art is most acceptable. I have already mentioned, if my memory fails to deceive me, the surprise I felt on encountering a similar Eve, even less clothed if that is possible, on the roof of Milan Cathedral.

One could continue this pilgrimage from church to church indefinitely, since all contain treasures which would lead to endless description; but I do not pretend to be writing a guide-book; I only wish to paint, in a personal manner, the life in Venice of an unbiased traveller, curious about everything, wandering everywhere, capable of sacrificing an ancient monument for a young woman passing by, taking chance as his cicerone, and only speaking, at the risk of being incomplete, of what he has seen himself. These are sketches made from nature, daguerreotype plates, small pieces of mosaic collected in situ, which are juxtaposed without my worrying too much about a correctness and uniformity that is perhaps impossible to achieve in something as diffuse as the wanderings on foot, or in a gondola, of a journalist on holiday in a city unknown to him, and where so many objects, on every side, arouse his curiosity.

So, without seeking a laborious transition, I will conduct you instantly to the Scuola Grande de San Rocco, an elegant building composed of two orders of superimposed Corinthian columns, each encircled, at a third of its height, by interlaced leaves and twigs in stone, to most beautiful effect.

Saint Roch, as we know, enjoyed the privilege of curing the plague; he is held in great veneration by the Venetians, who were particularly exposed to such contagions through Venice's trade relations with Constantinople and the seaports of the Levant. His statue shows, on his exposed thigh a dreadful dark bubo, since saints are homoeopaths, and only heal the diseases they are afflicted by. The plague is treated by a plague-stricken saint, ophthalmia by a martyr whose eyes were gouged out, and so on. This is a case, as we say, of: *Similia similibus*. Medicine aside, doubtless these blessed characters sympathised more tenderly with those subject with regard to the evils they suffered.

At the Scuola de San Rocco, there is a lower room entirely painted by Tintoretto, that fearful consumer of tasks, and, climbing a magnificent monumental staircase by Scarpagnino (*Antonio Abboni*), one has, to right and left, as if to justify the name and patronage of that saint of the plague, different episodes of the great Venetian epidemic of 1630, which might equally serve as illustrating the Parisian cholera. These cadaverous paintings are: on the right, a work by Antonio Zanchi; on the left, one by Pietro Negri.

In the first of these paintings, we see the arrival of the plague in Venice. The scourge, personified in the figure of a skeleton, traverses the dense unhealthy air, carried by a woman

with withered breasts, haggard, gaunt, and green as putrefaction, in winged flight, in a pose from the Triumph of Death by Orcagna. In the foreground, a woman flees in three-quarter view; she is blonde and chubby like any true Venetian woman, and it would really be too bad if the hideous spectre reached her, since she is so charming in her fright and perfectly drawn.

On the other side, a very solidly planted gondolier, of gigantic proportions and exaggerated musculature, urges on, with a superb movement, a boat intended for the transport of corpses. A female corpse, shadowed in black, with livid flesh, but whose fleshy arms and powerfully-outlined throat show that she was but a moment ago struck down as if by lightning by the scourge, presents herself, head first, in a violent and dramatic foreshortening; near her a man holds his nose (a naive and dreadful detail), not being able to bear the stench of this beautiful body barely cold, and already decomposing.

This lugubrious invocation is completed by *The End of the Plague*. The air is calmer. A woman in the foreground reveals very beautiful shoulders, of a whiteness more vivid than those bluish tints of the livid flesh which summon up chlorine and quicklime. Health has returned to the people. One can breathe without fear of swallowing poison, squeeze a friendly hand without bearing away the germ of death. The Republic, through the powerful intercession of Saint Roch, has obtained from heaven the cessation of the scourge. All this upper group is done with delightful grace. The saint, inclined at the feet of Jesus Christ and the Virgin, begs with ineffable ardour, and we understand that celestial goodness cannot refuse so fervent a prayer. The republic, symbolised by a beautiful woman, in the style of Paolo Veronese, holds a most noble pose in a twisting attitude; it is annoying that her hands are not in accord with the beauty of her head.

It is at the Scuola de San Rocco, that Tintoretto's masterpiece is to be found, that artist being so fertile and so uneven that he transitions from the sublime to the detestable with prodigious ease. This immense painting presents, in extensive development, all the blood-stained drama of the Crucifixion. It occupies the end of a large room.

The sky, doubtless painted with that Egyptian blue pigment which played such evil tricks on the artists of the period, has false and elusive tones unpleasant to the eye and unseen before the carbonisation of that erroneous colour, which so strangely blackened the background of Paolo Veronese's *The Supper at Emmaus*; but this imperfection is quickly forgotten, as the foreground groups capture the viewer completely, after a few minutes of contemplation. The sacred women form a trio near the cross expressing the profoundest desperation human suffering can conceive; one of them, completely covered with her mantle, lies on the ground and sobs, in desolate prostration, to most pitiful effect.

A black African, stands on tiptoe, to raise the cross of one of the thieves, with a strained and contorted movement, which lacks naturalness; but he is painted, like everything else in this work, with a brush so vehement and furious, that we cannot help but admire him. Never did Rubens, Rembrandt, Géricault, or Delacroix, in their most feverish and turbulent sketches, achieve such anger, such rage, such ferocity. With this work, Tintoretto fully justifies his name Robusti; pure vigour cannot be taken further; it is violent, exaggerated, melodramatic, but full of a supreme quality: strength.

This canvas, radiant with sovereign artistry, excuses the painter his many acres of smoky encrustations and blackened colours that are encountered at every step in the palaces, churches, and galleries, of Venice, and which are rather those of a dye-maker than a painter. The *Crucifixion* bears the date 1565.

Before leaving the Scuola di San Rocco, one must view Titian's very fine *Christ Carrying the Cross*, the face revealing a sad and profound expression; also, charming bronze altar gates, cast in 1756 by Guiseppe Filiberti, of an exquisite delicacy and with an astonishing perfection of detail. These works precious, despite their modern date, represent different features of the life of Saint Roch, the patron saint of the place. The joinery work in the upper room is also very remarkable. But, if we set out to admire everything here, our task would never end.

Following my serendipitous method, let me return to the Grand Canal, and offer some details regarding C'a Vendramin Calergi, the palace now occupied by the Duchesse de Berry. The architecture, rich and noble, was designed by Mauro Codussi; in the entablature and above the windows, little sculpted spirits support historical ornamented crests in excellent taste, and grant the facade a degree of elegance; a garden of moderate extent displayed a few verdant trees next to the palazzo, which would be indistinguishable from others if the large mooring posts, in white and blue, did not indicate, by the fleurs-de-lis with which they are sown, a princely and quasi-royal residence.

Once one has obtained permission to visit the palace, valets in green livery welcome one, most politely, at the foot of the stairs, whose steps the water bathes, moor one's gondola to the poles, and introduce one to a vestibule to await the fulfilment of the formal process of admission.

This vestibule runs the length of the palace; it creates a sort of courtyard similar to the courtyards of our hotels; one needs to remember that we are in Venice, so one should not expect to see an unharnessed carriage, or saddle-horses returned from the woods.

Two stored gondolas, alone, and a few earthenware pots filled with fir trees and other meagre plants dying of thirst, furnished the bareness of this vast waiting room of a type to be found in all Venetian palaces, an antechamber which also serves as a landing stage.

In the middle of this vestibule, on the left, is a large staircase between two walls, where two ropes of red silk hang, and a like array of unfortunate perennial plants reigns. A narrow carpet lines the steps and leads to an immense room, similar to the vestibule, without furniture or ornament. From there one enters the dining room, whose walls are covered with family portraits. This room takes the form of a long rectangle. It is well-lit by two large balcony windows.

An oval table occupied the middle, and a screen hid the entrance. On the right wall we noticed a portrait of the Duchess of Burgundy, in a velvet blue dress; those of the Comte d'Artois and Madame la Princesse de Lamballe, and several minor officials. On the left wall, opposite, an equally full-length portrait of Louis XV; and, on each side, those of his daughters, Mesdames de France.

From this dining room, a concealed door opens onto a dark chapel, so small that it could scarcely contain six people. There are four prie-dieus within. On the right, a large door gives

access to a wholly modern living room, cluttered with paintings, and an infinity of small pieces of furniture: English tables, Parisian coffers, no lack of those charming useless luxuries which recall one's homeland through its cherished trivialities; two portraits of Her Royal Highness the Duchesse de Berry are placed opposite: one by Thomas Lawrence shows her in a white satin dress, with a rose pinned at her left side, and reveals the most delightful little foot in a satin shoe that it is possible to gaze on. The entire far end of this room is covered by such paintings as everyone has seen at the art exhibitions of the day, for the most part representing heroes of the insurrection in the Vendée.

Re-crossing the dining room, one enters, via a door on the left, a living room which seems relatively small compared to the previous rooms, and somewhat overwhelmed by the sumptuous furniture that it contains. There are thirty places set for the elite; it forms a kind of Tribune, a Salon Carré, in which not a single one, it may be, of the great artists is unrepresented. Among these masterpieces a *Virgin* by André del Sarto, glows with a beauty to thrill the least knowledgeable of bourgeois visitors, the most prosaically armoured philistine.

This living room, illuminated by mild and gentle daylight, appeared to be the favoured room, the very heart of the building, and it was with regret that we departed to visit the famous salon where two porphyry columns are located, their value so great that it surpasses that of the entire palazzo. They are placed in front of a doorway, and produce little more effect than the lapis lazuli of the Salon of the Palazzo Serra in Genoa, which one would readily believe to be painted and varnished, and frighteningly close to resembling blue metallic moire. They both appear false, though most incontestably genuine.

What adds to this unfortunate impression, is that, opposite these columns, in one of those tall chimney breasts whose architecture meets the vault above, stands a stove which may provide comfort, but has nothing elegant about it, and whose earthenware does not go well with the porphyry. There is still one last room which reveals nothing remarkable. At the four corners, four pedestals support four busts: those of the Duc de Berry, Charles X, and two other members of the royal family. From there, one meets with the apartments of Count Ettore Lucchesi-Palli, and the tour is done.

It would merely be expressing a philosophical commonplace if I were to transcribe here such thoughts regarding the fragility of human fortune as this visit to the Vendramin-Calergi palace, a humble refuge for the misfortunes of the great, necessarily gave rise to. But it is not the first time that Venice has possessed the privilege of sheltering fallen royalty; Voltaire's *Candide* supped there at the inn with six deposed monarchs, who lacked the means to pay the bill (See '*Candide*', Chapter 26).

From the palace of the Duchess of Berry, we went to the Palazzo Barbarigo, to see the famous Titian paintings there. Unfortunately, the Russian consul had just bought them for his master the Czar, and the precious collection was under seal, awaiting its departure. We had to be content with a few works of little value, and the carved and gilded coffered ceilings which are very beautiful, but in an unfortunate state of disrepair.

We were also shown a wonderful overburdened cradle with extravagant ornamentation of an excessive richness, like the cradle of some long-hoped-for king's son; it was in this golden

crib that the eldest of the Barbarigo family slept. Now the cradle is empty; the Titians leave for Russia; rain filters through the gilding of the cracked ceilings, and the facade, covered with mould from humidity and neglect, will subside into the green waters of the canal.

We left there with broken hearts. Nothing was sadder than that cradle, belonging to an extinct family, in a palace that was crumbling away.

We welcomed, instead, our visit to the post office to collect our letters from France, currently the humble abode of another figure fallen from greatness, Daniele Manin, an unsung hero equal to the most famous heroes of antiquity. On the modest balcony of his apartment, on the corner of Calle San Paternian, a few neglected pots of flowerless hyacinths withered, and the dusty windows had the melancholy aspect that houses acquire whose spirit has departed for exile, or for death and eternal exile.

## **Part XXV: The Ghetto – Murano – Vicenza**

One day, we wandered adventurously into Venice's lost corners, since we like to know something of a city other than that given by the official view, sketched, described, and related everywhere, and were curious, our legitimate tribute of admiration having been paid, to lift the monumental mask that every city places over its face to conceal its ugliness and miseries. From alley to alley, by dint of crossing bridges and taking side paths, we arrived, near Canarregio, in a Venice which scarcely resembles the charming Venice of the watercolourists. Half-collapsed houses, their windows closed by boards; deserted squares, empty spaces where laundry dried on lines, and a few ragged children played; arid beaches on which boatmen were caulking their boats amidst thick clouds of smoke; abandoned churches shattered by the Austrian bombs, some of which had burst over these city extremes; and canals with dense green water, where empty pallets and the detritus of vegetables floated, formed scenes of misery, solitude, and abandonment which created a painful impression. Artificial cities, won from the sea, like Venice, need wealth and splendour; all the richness of the arts, all the magnificence of architecture, is required, to console its inhabitants for the absence of Nature. Though a palazzo designed by Vincenzo Scamozzi or Michele Sanmicheli looks fine, with its balconies, columns and marble staircase, on the banks of the Grand Canal, nothing is sadder than a derelict house subsiding between sky and water, woodlice running about its mouldy feet, crabs gripping the stones.

We had been walking for some time through a maze of alleyways which often brought us back to our point of departure. We noted with surprise the absence of religious emblems on the street corners; no more little chapels, no more Madonnas decorated with ex-votos, no more carved crosses in the squares, no more effigies of saints, none of those external signs of Christian devotion so numerous in other areas of the city. Everything seemed strange, rawer, and more mysterious. The odd furtive figure glided silently between the walls with a circumspect air. These figures lacked the Venetian appearance. Semitic features, coal-black eyes in pallid faces, lean cheeks, narrower chins, everything showed a different origin. The rags that covered their poverty were skimpy, pitiful, dirty, with a particular sordidness,

denoting want even more than poverty, misery more than mere hardship, and arousing pity rather than contempt.

The streets narrowed more and more; the houses rose in towers of superimposed hovels, seeking a little breathable air and light above the shadows and mire. Several of these houses had nine floors, nine levels of ragged clothes, waste, and humble industry. All the forgotten diseases of the leprosariums of the Near East seemed to be gnawing away at those neglected walls; the humidity speckled them with dark patches like gangrene; the efflorescence of saltpetre there simulated in the plaster the roughness, warts and buboes of plague; the plaster, peeling like scabby skin, peeled off in scaly films. No edge was perpendicular; everything was lopsided; one floor was hollowed out the next projected; the bleary-eyed windows lacked whole panes. Paper was plastered over them here and there, bandaging though inadequately the windows' wounds; sticks, like fleshless arms, waved indescribable rags above the passers-by; soiled mattresses were drying in the sun on the sills of those black and gaping apertures.

In places, remnants of red brick rendering, and crumbling plaster, gave to some of the facades, less decrepit than the others, an unhealthy flush like the one that dulls the cheekbones or chest of a low-class courtesan covered with make-up. These houses were none the less ugly and repulsive, though one might say health triumphed there over death, artifice over misery. Which is the least repellent, a corpse with all its lividity, or a corpse whose yellow wax face has been adorned with vermilion?

Ruined bridges, bending their arched backs as if crushed by the years, and close to letting their arches slide into the water, connected these masses of shapeless hovels together, separated by stagnant, muddy canals, black as ink, green as mud, clogged with rubbish of all kinds, which the tide lacks the strength to scour away, powerless as it is to stir the sleeping water, opaque and heavy, similar to that of the Stygian Marsh, and the rivers of Hades.

Finally, we emerged onto a fairly large paved square in the midst of which yawned the stone mouth of a cistern. At one corner stood a building of superior architectural aspect, including the doorway which was surmounted by an inscription carved in Hebrew characters. The mystery of the absence of Christian motifs was explained; this fetid and unhealthy neighbourhood, this aquatic 'Court of Miracles', was simply the Ghetto, the Jewish Quarter in Venice, which sadly retained a sordidness more characteristic of the Middle Ages.

Perhaps, if we had entered those rotten houses, cracked, and striped with foul slime, we might have found, as in ancient Jewish Quarters, Rebeccas and Rachels of radiant oriental beauty, adorned with gold and precious stones, seated like Hindu idols on the most precious carpets from Smyrna, amidst golden dishes and priceless riches piled up through paternal prudence; because Jewish poverty is sometimes a cover. If the Christian may adopt a false air of luxuriousness, the Jew may adopt one of false poverty, akin to certain insects that, to escape their persecutors, roll in the dust and render themselves the colour of mud. This habit acquired in the Middle Ages, when it was essential for survival, has not yet been lost, though nothing justifies it now, and it is continued with the obstinacy as regards customs attributable to every people.

The building decorated with a Hebrew inscription was the synagogue. We entered. A rather fine staircase led into a large rectangular room lined with well-carved woodwork, upholstered with a splendid red silk damask. The Talmud, like the Koran, forbids its adherents all reproductions of the human figure, and treats this aspect of art as an idolatrous practice. Synagogues are necessarily bare like mosques or Protestant temples, and therefore cannot achieve the magnificence of Catholic cathedrals, regardless of the aspirations of the faithful. This creed, wholly abstract, is meagre on the eye: a pulpit for the rabbi who comments on the Pentateuch, a forum for the cantor who leads the prayers, a cabinet in which the scrolls of the Torah are kept, and that is all.

We noticed, in this synagogue, a large number of chandeliers in yellow copper with curved arms and a sphere below, akin to the Dutch taste, as is often seen in the paintings of Gerrit Dou or Frans van Mieris the Elder, notably Gerit Dou's painting of the *Dropsical Woman*, which is the subject of a popular engraving, and Frans Van Mieris' *The Cloth Shop*. These chandeliers probably came from Amsterdam, the northern Venice, where the Jewish population is also large. The abundance of lighting should not be surprising, because seven-branched candlesticks, lamps, and torches accord with the Biblical texts.

The Jewish cemetery is on the Lido; the sand covers it, vegetation invades it, and children have no scruples about trampling and dancing on overturned or split tombstones. When we criticised them for their irreverence, they responded, naively: 'They are Jews.' A Jew, or a dog is the same thing in their eyes. These tombs, for them, cover, not corpses, but carrion. The funeral field to them is not a cemetery, but a throughfare. In Spain, in Puerto de Santa Maria, we heard a similar thing; a black African, a menial, had just been killed by a bull in the arena; his body was carried away, and we were all moved: 'Calm down,' said a neighbour, it's nothing; he's only an African.' Jew or African, they are human, nonetheless! How long will it still be necessary to teach this to children and barbarians?

Nothing is sadder, more dreary or more heartbreaking than this uneven sandy ground with tombs like tumuli. The half-erased inscriptions, in characters that we could not read, further added to their mystery, their air of oblivion and isolation; we were unable to give the dead, lying there, the satisfaction of hearing their names and epitaphs recited. This cemetery reminded us of an Arab cemetery near Oran, on a dusty, stony hill, of dreadful aridity, swept by the sea wind, scorched by the sun, through which we passed without paying more attention to the collapsed tombs than the stones in our path. At least the Arab dead were not troubled by the sound of songs and *saltarellos*; because the Lido is both a cemetery and a tavern: they bury the dead, and dance there as well.

The Christians of Venice are allowed to sleep more peacefully, on the little island of San Michele, on the way to Murano; they are laid to rest beneath the briny sand, which must lie softly on the bones of a Venetian, and the gondolas, as they pass, by salute the crosses.

Murano has wholly lost its ancient splendour; it is no longer, as in the past, the magical source of false pearls, mirrors and glassware. Chemistry has plumbed its secrets; it no longer has the sole privilege of creating those beautiful bevelled mirrors, those tall glasses on filigreed bases, those ewers ribboned with milky spirals, those crystal spheres that seem like tears of the sea frozen on to delicate oceanic vegetation; or those glass beads that tinkle on the loincloths

of black African women. Bohemia's products are as good, Choisy-le-Roi's are better. The art, in Murano, has remained static amidst universal progress.

We visited one of its glassworks, where they manufacture small coloured beads. Long hollow tubes, in different tints, some transparent, others opaque, are chopped into small fragments, then rolled in boxes, until friction has rounded them; they polish them, then string these pearls with horsehair, and gather them in skeins.

A bottle was blown for us threaded with a white and pink filigree ribbon. Nothing is simpler and more expeditious than the process involved. The artisan was a tall and handsome lad, with black and curly hair, whose ruddy complexion scarcely confirmed the prejudice I had previously held regarding a profession deemed mortal, and which gentlemen can seemingly exercise without derogation. He took a lump of molten glass from the end of his tube, amalgamated the threads of colour that he wanted to turn at the same time, and with a single breath blew the piece, which swelled up, as frail and light as a soap bubble. He made a glass for us, in the same way, which he sold to us for a few coins.

Murano contains another curiosity that was shown to us with a certain pride: a horse, a creature more chimerical in Venice than a unicorn, griffin, coquecigrue, a flying billy-goat, or a succubus. There Richard III would cry: 'My kingdom for a horse!' in vain. It gave us particular pleasure to see this honest quadruped, an animal whose existence we were beginning to forget.

Encountering this horse made us somewhat nostalgic for dry land, and we returned to Venice in a dream. It seemed long since we had seen plains, mountains, cultivated fields, roads lined with trees, streets furrowed by carriages, and we thought nothing could be more pleasant than to hear the sound of the whip and the bells of a post-chaise. But a repeat visit to the Correr Museum, where, among a hundred other rarities, they keep the woodblock of that marvellous map of Venice engraved by Jacopo de' Barbari; to the Palazzo Manfrin, which contains a rich collection of works by the Venetian masters; and to various bric-a-brac merchants' shops, ossuaries where the ancient magnificence of the republic is laid to rest, soon chased away those rural and continental ideas.

A small incident delayed our initial wish to depart, by a few more days. One morning as we bargained, in a goldsmith's shop on the Frezzaria, for one of those little gold chains as fine as hair, which I wanted to bring back as a travel souvenir for one of my Parisian friends, we saw a beautiful girl enter, carelessly draped in a large striped shawl in bright colours, which was, in truth, the only piece of clothing she had on, except for the vest and white petticoat beneath it, an outfit which, however, is nothing extraordinary for Venice. If her toilette was succinct, her beautiful lustrous black hair, combed with care, the opulent braids of which coiled several times on her golden neck, formed a charming coiffure not lacking its flower placed neatly behind one ear; she approached the display and chose a bracelet of coins that she had undoubtedly coveted for several days. The merchant gave her a price that seemed exorbitant to her, and indeed was, given the small worth of the trinket, a fact which made her enter into the most entertaining fit of anger in the world.

All pink with disappointment, she began to insult the merchant in that sweet lispng Venetian patois that we were beginning to understand, and which is no less graceful even in a quarrel. She called the honest goldsmith a Jew, a scoundrel, a forger, and a '*Gran cane della Madonna*', a gross Italian profanity.

The merchant laughed, and maintained the price, without being moved by the charming outburst of invective he had provoked for our amusement, and which we ended by adding the cost of the bracelet to our account, on the condition that Vicenza, which was the girl's name, allowed us to sketch her.

Beautiful girls in Venice, though it is strange in a city so populated with painters, would rather consent to being one's mistress than one's model: they understand love far better than art, and believe themselves pretty enough to make us let fall our pencils and palettes while looking at them. According to them, only ugly people should pose. A singular theory which is nevertheless explained by their naive and fiery imaginations. They do not suppose that a young man young could copy their beauty coolly, or cast upon them that analytical and scrutinizing look by which flesh metamorphoses to marble. Such ideas perhaps offer an explanation for the unique female type employed by each Italian master.

Vicenza, who, in any other case, would have certainly been, less fierce, made a host of difficulties, but finally agreed to come and pose, accompanied by one of her friends, a former dance extra at La Fenice.

To tell the truth, she had little faith in our drawing abilities and anticipated a more gallant meeting; nor did her disbelief cease when she saw us open our pastel box, set the paper in place, and arrange our pencils.

Vicenza offered a brunette variation on Venetian beauty that is not found in the paintings of the old masters, excessively preoccupied with the blonde type, which alone they depict. She had skin of incredible fineness, an amber pallor, black nocturnal and velvety eyes, red and vivacious lips, and an air of something sweet and wild at the same time.

While posing, she bit and chewed at roses that she tore from her bouquet, removed and replaced her bracelet, made her slipper dance on the end of her foot, and rose every minute or so, to come and look over our shoulder to see how the work progressed. We found much difficulty in making her return to her place and re-adopting her pose.

Finally, the portrait was finished, for good or no; she was satisfied with it, and took it to give to her lover. But I have kept a copy which is sufficient to prove that, despite Paul Veronese, Giorgione, Titian and all their golden-haired women, there was at least one lovely brunette in Venice.

## Parts XXVI to XXXI - Padua, Ferrara, Florence

### Contents

Part XXVI: Details concerning Venetian Customs and Habits .....	173
Part XXVII: Padua.....	178
Part XXVIII: Ferrara and Bologna .....	184
Part XXIX: Florence .....	194
Part XXX: The Piazza della Signoria .....	201
Part XXXI: Foreigners and Florentines .....	211

### Part XXVI: Details concerning Venetian Customs and Habits

The season was advancing. Our stay in Venice had been prolonged beyond the limits that we had set in the general plan for our trip. We had delayed our departure from week to week, from day to day, and had always found some good reason to stay. Despite the light mists that began to hover in the morning over the lagoon, despite the sudden downpours that forced us to take refuge under the arcades of the Procuracies or the porch of a church, despite the fact that when we travelled by moonlight on the Grand Canal, the cold night air sometimes forced one to raise the window of the gondola, and unroll the black cloth of the felze, we nonetheless turned a deaf ear to the threat of autumn.

We were forever remembering a palazzo, church, or painting we had not seen. It was indeed essential, before leaving Venice, to visit the white church of Santa Maria Formosa, containing the famous *Saint Barbara Polyptych*, the work of Palma il Vecchio in which the saint is so well-portrayed, so heroically beautiful; and the house of Bianca Cappello, to which is linked the memory of a Venetian love-story full of a romantic charm which is scarcely dispelled on seeing the signboard of a French milliner, Madame Adèle Torchère, who sells hoods and hats in the room where, leaning nonchalantly on the balcony, the beautiful Bianca dreamed; and then the strange and superb church of San Zaccaria, where there is a wonderful altar painting, gleaming with gold, by Antonio Vivarini and Giovanni d'Alemagna, commissioned by Abbess Elena Foscari and Prioress Marina Donato, and the tomb of the great sculptor Alessandro Vittoria,

*Qui vivens vivos duxit de marmore vultus: who when alive brought life from the solid marble*

a magnificent conceit of an epitaph justified however, in this case, by a host of statues.

Or something else delayed us, a forgotten island, Matorbo, or Torcello where there is an interesting Byzantine Basilica, and Roman antiquities; or a picturesque facade on a little frequented canal, of which it was necessary to take a sketch; a thousand reasons of this kind, all reasonable, all excellent, yet none of which was the true reason, although we pretended to believe in them. We had yielded, despite ourselves, to that melancholy which grips the heart of even the most determined traveller, when leaving, perhaps forever, a longed-for country, a place where one spent beautiful days and more beautiful nights.

There are certain cities from which we separate as from a beloved mistress, our heart full, and tears in our eyes; they are a species of elective homeland where we are far happier than elsewhere, to which we dream of returning to die, and which appear to us in the midst of the sadness and complications of life like an oasis, an Eldorado, a divine city to which trouble is denied access, and the memories of which return on soaring wings. Granada, for me, has been one of these celestial Jerusalems that shine under a golden sun in the distant azure, like a mirage. I had been dreaming of it since childhood; I departed with tears, and with endless regret. Venice will be for me another Granada, regretted perhaps even more.

Has it ever happened to you that you have only a few days left to stay with a loved one? We gaze at them for a long time, fixedly, painfully, to engrave their features clearly in our memory; we saturate ourselves with their features, we study them every day, we notice their little unique markings, the mole near the mouth, the dimple in the cheek, or palm; we note the inflections and melodies of their voice, we try to retain as much as we can of the adored image that absence will steal from us, and that we will be able to see again only in our heart; we remain beside them, we seek to enjoy their presence till last second of the last minute; even sleep seems to us a theft committed on those precious hours, and endless conversations, conducted hand in hand, prolong themselves, without our noticing that the lamplight has faded, and the blue glow of dawn is filtering through the curtains.

We felt this in regard to Venice. As the moment of departure approached, she became more valuable to us. Her worth was revealed at the moment of loss. We blamed ourselves for having taken poor advantage of our stay, and bitterly regretted a few hours of idleness, cowardly concessions to the annoying influence of the sirocco. It seemed to us that we might have seen more, taken more notes, made more sketches, relied less on our memories: and yet, God knows, we had consciously carried on our profession of traveller; one found us in the churches, galleries, at the Accademia, in Saint Mark's Square, at the Doge's Palace, at Sansovino's Library. Our exhausted gondoliers begged for mercy; we barely took time to swallow an iced coffee at Florian's, a bowl of sea-lice soup and polenta pasticcio at the Gasthof San-Gallo or at the Capello-Nero tavern. In six weeks, we had worn out three eye-glasses, damaged a pair of binoculars, and lost a telescope. Never did any two people indulge in such visual debauchery.

We were gazing for fourteen hours a day without cease. If we had dared, we would have continued our sessions by torchlight.

In our last few days there, we were possessed by a true fever. We made a general tour, at racing pace, recapitulating our visits, with the clear swift glance of those who know what they are looking at, and go straight to the object they seek. Like those painters who retrace in ink the drawings done with a lead pencil that they fear will fade, we defined with a firmer stroke the thousand lineaments pencilled in our memory. We viewed once more the beauty of the Doge's Palace, made expressly for the set of a drama or an opera, with its great pink walls, its white serrations, its double register of columns, its Arabian quatrefoils; that Hagia Sophia of the West, the prodigious Saint Mark's Basilica, a colossal reliquary of vanished civilisations, its golden cavern variegated with mosaic, and immense columns of jasper, porphyry, alabaster, and ancient marble, a pirates' cathedral enriched with the spoils of the world; the Campanile which bears its golden angel so far aloft in the azure, as protector of Venice, and guards Sansovino's Loggetta, sculpted like a jewel, at its foot; the Clock Tower, on whose large gold and blue dial the hours parade in black and white; the Library, of a truly Athenian elegance, crowned with slender mythological statues, a smiling memory of neighbouring Greece; and the Grand Canal bordered by its double row of palaces, Gothic, Moorish, Renaissance, Rococo, whose diverse facades amaze with their inexhaustible fantasy and perpetual invention of detail that a lifetime would not be long enough to study, that splendid gallery of works on which the genius of Jacopo Sansovino, Vincenzo Scamozzi, Pietro Lombardo, Andrea Palladio, Baldassare Longhena, Guglielmo Bergamasco, Giovanni de' Rossi, Alessandro Tremignon, and other wonderful architects was deployed, without counting the anonymous, humble masons of the Middle Ages whose efforts are no less admirable.

We took a ride in a gondola, from the point of the Dogana to the tip of Quintavalle, to fix forever in our mind that magical spectacle, that painting which speech is powerless to render, and allowed our eyes to devour, with desperate attention, that mirage, that Fata-Morgana, close to disappearing forever from our sight.

Now, as I am nearing the end of my tale, perhaps already too long, whose pages the impatient reader will have quickly turned, it seems to me that I have said nothing, that I have only feebly expressed my enthusiasm and depicted my superb models badly. Every monument, every church, every gallery demanded a volume where I could barely supply a chapter, and yet I have only talked about what is visible; I was careful not to disturb the dust of old chronicles, revive extinct memories, repopulate the deserted palaces with their former inhabitants because that would be the work of a lifetime, and I have had to be content to draw, on plain paper, photographic impressions which have no other merit than their sincerity.

Often the temptation seized me, to summon the patricians and grandees from their portraits by Titian, Bonifazio Veronese, or Paris Bordone, and to call from their carved frames the beautiful women, with brocaded dresses and hair of burnt gold, depicted by Giorgione and Paolo Veronese and to animate the décor which has remained intact and which is only missing the actors. The magic names of Dandolo, Foscari, Loredan, Marino Faliero, and Queen Catherine Cornaro, have more than once excited my imagination. But I wisely resisted. What is the point of recreating admirable poems in prose?

My task was a humbler one. Reading the tales of travellers, we wished for more exact, more familiar details, noted on the spot, for more precise remarks regarding the thousand small differences which tell us we have exchanged countries. General descriptions and historical overviews, in a pompous style, repeat for us, more or less adequately, what we already know, but yield paucity of information about the shape of hats, the cut of dresses, the qualities and names of local dishes, in such or such a city. I have garnered my spoils from all this and described houses, taverns, thoroughfares, landing-stages, theatre-posters, marionettes, Chinese shadow-puppets, cafes, street-musicians, children, old men, and young girls, everything that is usually disdained.

Is it not of more interest to know how a Venetian grisette dresses, and how her shawl's folds lie on her shoulders, than to hear told, for the hundredth time, of the beheading of doge Marino Faliero on the Giants Staircase, which, incidentally, was only built a century or two after his death? Do you think it a matter of indifference to learn if the coffee is filtered, or heated with pomace brandy in the oriental fashion, at Florian's and La Costanza? This little cup of dark coffee made in the Turkish-style, does that not say everything about Venice's past? And if I copy for you, here, quite foolishly, a list of names gathered from the shop signs and walls, whose unique character announces that we are neither in Paris nor London, names such as Ermacora, Zamoro, Fogazzo, Zenobio, Dario, Paternian, Farsetti, Erizzo, Mangilli, Valmarana, Zorzi, Condulmer, Valcamonica, and Corner Zaguri, among others, will you not be amused and delighted by the form and euphony of these appellations so local, so romantic, so fluid, and so soft on the ear? Will not this litany bring you some echo of Venetian harmony?

I am a long way still from having fulfilled this program, however restricted it may be. The architecture I have rushed through, without needing to follow Nicolas Boileau's precept (*See Boileau's poem 'Tout doit tendre au bon sens'* advising restraint) in neglecting the festoon and the astragal. The streets, with their ever-renewed spectacle, have many times prevented us entering the houses, which is not always easy to achieve for travellers, we inconstant birds of flight, that like swallows arrive and depart with the summer. The manners and morals of Venetian society gain perhaps too little space in these sketches, and the portrait often hides the man. But, in this century of hypocritical cant, I lack the joyful, masculine freedom of Charles des Brosses' Italian letters, and it is difficult to speak of morals without being immoral.

To recount one's own adventures is to appear conceited; to relate those of others indiscreet. How can one, moreover, betray the intimate secrets to which one has been cordially admitted, and repeat in a book what one was told in a whisper? The external forms of life are today the same almost everywhere, especially in good company. Is it really necessary to say that *cicisbeos* (*cavalieri serventi*) no longer exist, and that Venetian women take lovers like the women of Paris, London or any other place? If one desires a more local observation, let us add that they often take one, but rarely two, a moral trait which extends to all of Italy; furthermore, it is not in good taste for the lover to be an Austrian; which is a way of resisting oppression and isolating the enemy.

Ancient families who are ruined live in retirement, and poorly, the owner of a palazzo dining, in a room lined with paintings by the great masters, on a dish of polenta, fried-food, or shellfish that his sole remaining valet has purchased from the inn.

In the summer, Venetians spend their holiday in country houses festooned with vines, on the banks of the Brenta, or on small rural farms in Friuli, and return to winter in Venice, like we Parisians. Aristocrats who no longer have country homes and cannot travel due to lack of resources, cloister themselves throughout the season and only reappear when it is acceptable to frequent Saint Mark's Square. To all this, naturally, there are exceptions: there are Venetian women lacking a lover, and the wealthy. Here the opposite to what I have said applies. Parties, balls, and dinners are rare. Fear of spies and informers makes for a very reserved form of society. Such folk only entertain themselves behind closed doors, and among those they trust. Luxury hides itself, and pleasure is muted, which makes it difficult to observe their manners on the wing.

Perhaps those who are kind enough to read this will criticise the myriads of artists' names piled up here, as if on whim. Truly, I have not done so to parade, in vain, my erudition: the Venetian school is of such fabulous richness that my prolixity seems to me more like laconicism and ingratitude. The tree of art formed, in this fertile city, branches so fully, so luxuriantly, is so loaded with fruit, that one has as much difficulty in following its ramifications as those of the genealogical tree of the Virgin in Saint Mark's Basilica, which simply displays kings, saints, patriarchs and prophets.

Beyond the four greatest names who personify Venetian art, Giorgione, Titian, Paolo Veronese, and Tintoretto, there are entire families of admirable painters. From Anthony Vivarini of Murano, to Tiepolo in whom the line was extinguished, a thousand-leafed Golden Book would be needed. to write the unknown names worthy of glory. The least of these artists would find fame today as a great genius, and those who currently pride themselves on their fame would make a poor showing among that mass of talents.

In reporting on the Accademia, I expressed my complete admiration for the wonderful Gothic school of Vivarini, Marco Basaiti, Carpaccio, and Giovanni and Gentile Bellini, who, to all the feeling of Andrea Mantegna, Pietro Perugino and Albrecht Dürer, joined a use of colour which anticipates Giorgione. But among the painters of that decadence which appeared following the death of Titian, what fertility, what ease, what a riot of invention, spirit, and colour!

Transcribing their names, here, would not stir any fresh thoughts; it would be necessary to add an analysis of their immense and innumerable works, to characterise their diverse styles, reconstruct their biographies, and recompose them in every aspect. It is a task that I might yet undertake, and which I have often attempted; but for that I would need a ten-year stay in Venice; which alone might tempt me to try. In the churches, and palazzos, they covered every surface with frescoes and paintings; they took advantage of every space Tintoretto left free.

What is insufficiently recognised is that Venice is full of sculptures, bas-reliefs, marble and bronze figures of the rarest merit, works of statuary equal to its paintings, but of which we never speak, and which we unreasonably ignore. We have named some of these artists; but anyone wanting a complete list would be faced with a very long litany. Human fame is capricious! Who now speaks of Alessandro Vittoria, of Tiziano Aspetti, of Alessandro Leopardi, of Jacopo Sansovino and so many other sculptors?

## Part XXVII: Padua

Now, at whatever cost, we were obliged to depart. Padua, the city of Ezzelino (*Ezzolino II da Romano*) and Angelo (see Victor Hugo's play '*Angelo, Tyrant of Padua*') called us. Farewell, dear Campo San Moisè, where we spent such sweet hours; farewell to the sunsets framing the Salute, the effects of moonlight on the Grand Canal, beautiful blondes in the public gardens, cheerful dinners under the vines of Quintavalle; farewell to the beautiful art and splendid painting, the romantic palaces of the Middle Ages, and the Greek facades by Palladio; farewell to the doves of Saint Mark's; farewell to the gulls over the lagoon, bathing on the Lido beach, our journeys by gondola; Venice, 'fare thee well, and if forever, still forever, fare thee well!' in the words uttered by Lord Byron, from the height of his disdain, regarding an altogether different relationship.

The railway carries us off, and already the Venus of the Adriatic has plunged her pink and white form, once more, beneath the azure of the sea.

Disembarking from the gondola to take one's seat in a railway carriage is a discordant action. The two seem unsuited to being experienced together. One, expresses the memory of romance; the other, prosaic reality. Zorzi de Cataro, the gondolier, delivers you, abruptly, to George Stephenson, the engineer. You were in Venice, now you are in England or America. O Titian! O Paolo Veronese! Who would have thought that your turquoise sky would one day be stained by the smoke from a British engine, and the azure of your lagoons would reflect the arches of a viaduct? So, the world changes; but here the contrast is more acute, for the forms of a vanished age have remained otherwise intact, and the present still wears the skin of the past.

We had already travelled this road, but in the reverse direction, when passing from Verona to Venice. A storm, bursting upon us with thunder, lightning, and rain, revealed to us a landscape of a particularly fierce and fantastic character, a landscape which, seen in normal weather, offers a series of well-cultivated stretches, traversed by canals, garlanded with vines climbing happily from one tree to another, its lovely horizons rising to blue hills and dotted with villas, whose whiteness stands out against the green of the gardens; a rich aspect, abundant and fertile.

For travelling companions, in the railway carriage, we had two or three monks of a pleasant disposition, and some young priests tall, thin, and of a youthful gracefulness, with oval blissful faces, of that uniform pallor, that deathlike hue, beloved by the Italian masters, and who resembled Gothic angels from Fiesole, plucked of their wings, their golden nimbus replaced by a tricorne or Basel hat. One of them was exactly reminiscent of Raphael's portrait; but the dull eye lacked a spark, and the mouth opened vaguely in a foolish smile; otherwise, his looks would have been perfect. The sight of these seminarians made me reflect that adolescence does not exist in France. That charming transition from childhood to youth is totally absent at home. Between the hideous middle-school *gamin*, with large red hands, and lanky appearance, and the *gaillard* who shaves or sports a beard, there is nothing. The Greek *epebe*, the Algerian

*yalouled*, the Italian *ragazzo*, the Spanish *muchacho*, fill, with a young grace, and a beauty still hovering between the sexes, the gap which separates the child from the man. It would be interesting to research the reasons why we are deprived of this nuance; especially since there are plenty of English adolescents who are beautiful, though a little awkward perhaps because of the sailor-suits they are condemned to wear.

While reflecting on this problem of physiology, we arrived at the station: ten leagues are soon devoured, even on an Italian railway. There, a crowd of rascally coachmen were waiting for us, as we disembarked to their shouts and fierce gesticulations; they fought over the travellers and their luggage, like the *cochers de coucou* (*cabriolet drivers*) on the Place de la Concorde in Paris, or the *robeiroo* in Avignon on the Quai du Rhône. One seizes your arm, another a leg; you are lifted from the ground, and, if you are not robust enough to calm their ardour with a few good blows, you run the risk of being quartered like a regicide and dragged away by four porters.

About twenty carriages, cabriolets, berlingots, and other vehicles, were parked at the gate to the station. It surprised and delighted us to see horses and carriages. It was almost two months since, if we except that lone horse on the isle of Murano, that the sight had presented itself. We rented a carriage to bear us and our trunk as far as Padua, which is some way from the railway station. Unaccustomed as we were to all noise of this kind by our silent locomotion through Venice, the sound of the wheels, and the trampling of the horses deafened us, and seemed unbearable; we needed several days for it to become familiar.

Padua is an ancient city, standing proud on the horizon, with its bell-towers, domes, and old walls, over which many a lizard scampers, wriggling about in the sun. Placed too close to the larger city which draws all life to itself, Padua is dead, with a well-nigh deserted air. Its streets, lined with twin rows of low arcades, seemed sad, and nothing there recalled the elegant graceful architecture of Venice. Its massive, heavy buildings, bear a somewhat serious frown, and the deep dark porches of the houses looked like mouths yawning from boredom.

We were taken to a large inn, probably established in some ancient palazzo, whose large rooms, debased by vulgar use, had once kept better company. It was a long journey from the vestibule to our room via host of stairs and corridors; it needed a map, or Ariadne's clue, to find one's way around.

Our windows opened onto quite a pleasant view: a river flowed at the foot of the wall, the Brenta or the Bacchiglione, I am not sure which, since both provide water to Padua. The banks of this watercourse were lined with old houses and long walls above which trees projected; picturesque embankments, from which fishermen cast their lines with a patience which characterises them in all countries, and huts with nets and cloths hanging from the windows to dry, formed, beneath scratchy rays of light, a charming motif for a watercolour.

After dinner, we visited Caffè Pedrocchi, famous throughout Italy for its magnificence. Nothing is more monumentally classic. Nothing but pillars, columns, ovals, and palmettes, in the neoclassical style of Charles Percier and Pierre Fontaine, all very grand and heavy with marble. What was most interesting were immense geographical maps, forming a tapestry of sorts, representing the various parts of the world on an enormous scale. This somewhat pedantic

ornamentation gave the room an academic air, and we were surprised not to see a pulpit instead of a counter, and a professor in his robes instead of a master lemonade -maker. As to that, since Padua is a university town, it is good that the students can continue their studies while enjoying their iced-drinks or coffee.



*Padua - Palace of the Royal University*

The University of Padua was once famous. In the thirteenth century, eighteen thousand young people, a whole army of scholars, followed the lessons of its learned teachers among whom Galileo later figured; one of his vertebrae is retained as a relic, that of a martyr who suffered for the truth. The facade of the University is very beautiful; four Doric columns grant

it a severe and monumental look; but solitude has established itself in many of the lecture rooms, in the rest of which, today, scarcely a thousand students are taught.

The theatre posters announced Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, and a traditional ballet: we had found our evening's entertainment. The stage was very simple; the set seemed to have been painted by a maker of stained-glass on a spree, and recalled the cardboard cut-out scenery that children love to employ. But the actors had lively voices and that natural taste which characterises the least of Italian singers. *Rosina* was young and charming, and *Basilio* reminded me of Antonio Tamburini, as regards the depth of his baritone voice.

The aria *La calunnia* was sung as well as it might have been sung in a first-rate theatre. But the ballet was truly strange, composed in the most entertaining fossilised, antediluvian style in all the world; one found oneself transported, as if by magic, to the heyday of classical melodrama, to the world of Guilbert de Pixérécourt and Louis-Charles Caigniez in all its purity; the scenario was reminiscent of *Les Aqueducs de Cosenza*; *Robert, Chef des Brigands*; *Le Pont du Torrent*, and other masterpieces neglected by the current generation. It was a tale of a traveller lost in the woods, of an inn of cutthroats, of a sensitive young girl, of bandits dressed as Cossacks, with voluminous red trousers, formidable beards, and an arsenal of cutlasses and pistols in their belts, all involved in dances and regular fights with sabres and axes, as in the ancient and most glorious days of the Théâtre des Funambules, in Paris, before Champfleury (*Jules Fleury-Husson*) introduced literature to that naive form of theatricals.

A handsome officer underwent terrible events with the obligatory heroism of all young leaders, followed about by a wretched *Jocrisse* (*comedy valet*). By a singular act of the imagination, this *Jocrisse* was played as a soldier of the Old Guard, dressed in a ragged uniform, made up like a macaque, adorned with a red nose which emerged from a bush of moustaches and grey sideburns, and possessing piercing eyes buried beneath crow's-foot wrinkles traced out in charcoal. The comedy depended on his perpetual fright at the slightest stirring of leaves, and his chattering teeth and colic nature of a soldier of the Old Guard, crazed by terror and cowardice. Transforming a model of bravery into an example of cowardice, and representing a curmudgeon of the Grande Armée as prone to the anxieties of a pantomime Pierrot, seemed to us a risky and fantastic idea in poor taste. My chauvinism was aroused, and I was obliged to reflect on the role in which the Cirque Olympique has cast the Prussians to calm my mind.

The next day we went to visit the cathedral dedicated to Saint Anthony, who enjoys in Padua the same adoration as Saint Januarius in Naples. He is the *Genius loci* (*spirit of the place*), the saint venerated above all others. He performed no less than thirty miracles per day, if Giacomo Casanova is to be believed. He well deserved his nickname of the miracle worker; his prodigious zeal slowed somewhat, yet the saint's credit was nonetheless undiminished, and so many masses are ordered at the altar, that the powers of the cathedral priests and the number of days in the year are inadequate to satisfying the demand. To liquidate the account, the Pope allows Masses to be conducted at the end of each year, every one of which carries a thousandfold value; in that manner, Saint Anthony avoids bankrupting the faithful.



*Padua - The cathedral*

In the square which borders the cathedral, stands a beautiful bronze equestrian statue by Donatello, the first to be cast since antiquity, representing the condottieri leader, Gattamelata (*Erasmus da Narni*), a brigand who certainly did not deserve that honour. But the artist rendered him with a proud attitude and presence, and with a Roman Emperor's baton, and that fully sufficed.

The Basilica of St. Anthony consists of an aggregation of domes and pinnacles, and a large facade in brick, with a triangular pediment, beneath which reigns a gallery with ribs and columns; three small doors,

pierced below high arches, front the three naves. The interior is excessively rich, cluttered with chapels and tombs of different styles. We saw examples there of the art of every era, from the naive religious and delicate art of the Middle Ages, to the excessive crumpled fantasies of the rococo style. We noted a most gallant chapel in the Pompadour manner; angels in wigs play dancing master's violins, and perform an *avant-deux* (*line dance*) in the clouds. They lack only rouge and beauty-spots. What was more curious, was a black and white marble tomb, in the same playful and excessive taste. There Death plays the coquette, and smiles with bared teeth like Marie Guimard after a pirouette. Death presents an amorous appearance and gracefully advances fleshless shins. We had never imagined a skeleton could be so playful.

Fortunately, Giotto's *Genealogy of Jesus Christ*, and a *Madonna* by the same painter, donated by Petrarch, correct this untimely cheerfulness somewhat, and Catholic seriousness regains its rights over tombs of the fourteenth and the fifteenth century, on which stiffened statues lie, gravely, with clasped hands. The cloister which adjoins the church is paved with funeral slabs, and its walls vanish under the mass of sepulchral monuments with which they are adorned; we read a number of the epitaphs, which were very beautiful. The Italians retain their ancestral secret as regards lapidary Latin.

The Abby of St. Justina is a huge basilica with a bare façade, and tediously sober and impoverished interior architecture. Good taste is always essential, but not when taken to such a point, and I prefer the wild exuberance and excessive contortions of rococo to such nothingness. A beautiful altar painting by Paolo Veronese (*The Martyrdom of Saint Justina*), highlights this poverty. If the church is dull and without character, one cannot say the same for the two gigantic monsters that guard it, lying on its stairs like faithful mastiffs. Japanese chimera never possessed a more frightening and dreadful appearance than those fantastic animals, a species of hideous griffin, with the rump of a lion, and the wings of an eagle, the foolish yet ferocious head, ending in a blunt beak pierced by oblique nostrils like that of the turtle. The monstrous creatures hold tight to their chests, beneath their claws, a warrior on horseback, caparisoned in medieval armour, whom they crush with a slow pressure, while gazing vaguely at something like the cow of which Victor Hugo speaks (*see Hugo's poem 'La Vache'*), and otherwise unconcerned by the convulsive efforts of the myrmidon crushed thereby.

What does the knight, caught with his mount in the relentless claws of these crouching monsters, signify? What myth is concealed in that dark sculptural fantasy? Do the pair of creatures illustrate some legend or are they simply sinister hieroglyphics indicating Fate? We could not guess, and no one knew or wished to tell us. The other day, in leafing through the album that Prince Alexey Soltykov brought back from India, we found an illustration showing, in the propylaea of a Hindu pagoda, an identical monster, also in the process of suffocating an armed man against its chest.

Whatever the meaning of these fearful creatures, I divine, there, vague confused memories of cosmogonic antagonism, and the struggle between the principles of good and evil: it is Ahriman conquering Ahura Mazda, or Shiva battling with Vishnu. Later, under the porch of the Cathedral of Ferrara, we saw two of these Chimeras, this time crushing lions.

One thing that should not be overlooked, when in Padua, is to visit the ancient Arena chapel, located at the bottom of a garden amidst dense and luxuriant vegetation, where one would certainly not expect it unless one were so advised.

The church interior was painted throughout by Giotto. No column, no rib, no architectural division interrupts the vast tapestry of frescoes; the general appearance is soft, azure, starry akin to a beautiful calm sky; ultramarine dominates, and sets the local tone; thirty large compartments, indicated by simple borders, contain the life of the Virgin and that of her divine Son, in extensive detail: one might describe them as illustrations, in miniature, to a gigantic missal. The characters, in one of those naive anachronisms so dear to history, are dressed in the fashions of Giotto's day.

Below these compositions, of a charming sweetness and exhibiting the purest religious feeling, a painted plinth shows the seven deadly sins, and other allegorical figures, symbolised in an ingenious way, in a very accomplished style; a paradise and a hell, subjects which preoccupied many artists of this era, complete this wonderful group. There are odd touching details in these paintings; children come out of their tiny coffins so as to ascend to heaven with joyful alacrity, and race off to play on the flowery lawns of the celestial garden; others extend their hands to their half-resurrected mothers. We might also note that all the devils and vices are obese, while the angels and virtues are long and slender. The painter thus marks the preponderance of matter in some, and the spirit in others.

I must record here a remark of a picturesque and physiological nature. The female Paduan type differs greatly from that of the Venetian, despite the proximity of the two cities; the women's beauty is more severe and more classical: dense brown hair, marked eyebrows, dark eyes and a serious gaze, a pale olive complexion, and a slightly matt oval face, recall the main features of the Lombard race; the black *bautas* which frame these beautiful girls' faces, gives them, as they file in silence along the deserted arcades, a proud and fierce air, which contrasts with the vague smile and easy grace of the Venetians.

View, in Piazza Salone, the Palace of Justice (*Palazzo della Ragione*), a vast building in Moorish style, with galleries, columns, and denticulated battlements, which contains the largest room, perhaps, in the world, and recalls the architecture of the Doge's Palace in Venice; and in the Scuola del Santo, the glorious frescoes by Titian, the only ones we know of produced by that great artist; and you will avoid major regret on leaving Padua.

They still display there, the instruments of torture, easels, straps, pliers, pincers, boots, toothed wheels, saws, and cleavers, which Ezzelino, most famous among tyrants, used on his victims and beside whom *Angelo* is nothing but an angel of kindness. I bore a letter to the enthusiast who preserves this bizarre collection, fit for an executioner's museum. We could not locate him, to my great regret, and we left the same evening for Rovigo, tearing ourselves away with difficulty from that sweet Lombardo-Venetian kingdom, which lacks nothing, except, alas, liberty!

## **Part XXVIII: Ferrara and Bologna**

A horse-drawn omnibus takes a few hours to travel from Padua to Rovigo, at which we arrived in the evening. While awaiting our supper, we wandered through the streets of the city, lit by silvery moonlight which made it possible to discern the silhouettes of monuments; low arcades like those of the old Place Royale in Paris run along the sides of the streets, and with their alternating light and shadow form long cloisters which, that evening, recalled the effect of the stage-set of Act III of Meyerbeer's *Robert Le Diable* with its *Ballet of the Nuns*.

Rare pedestrians passed by silently like shadows; a few plaintive dogs barked at the moon, and the city already seemed asleep, the windows everywhere unilluminated, with the exception of a few brightly-lit cafes, where the regulars, looking bored and sleepy, consumed an iced

drink, a half-cup, or a glass of water in small spoonfuls, sipping slowly, wisely, and methodically, raising their heads now and then to read an insignificant article in the censored *Diario*, like people who have many hours to endure, and await the time when they can depart for bed.

In the morning, at dawn, we were obliged to climb into a sort of *guimbarde* (*two-wheeled carriage*) holding the middle ground between a French *patache* and a Valencian *tartane*. Delicate travellers may set here an elegy, filled with pathos, on the discomfort offered by these kinds of vehicles; but the Spanish *galera* (*covered cart*) and postal wagon, driven on the most abominable tracks in the world, had rendered me extremely philosophical as regards such small inconveniences. Besides, those who wish for all their home comforts only need to remain there. An Erlor coupé on the macadam of the Champs-Élysées gives an infinitely softer ride, and it is indisputable that we dine better at the Freres-Provençaux (*in the Palais Royale*) than in some hotel on the main road.

The journey from Rovigo to Ferrara is not very picturesque: flat land, cultivated fields, Northern trees; one could believe oneself in a department of France.

We crossed the River Po, its waters yellowish; its low, bare banks vaguely recalling those of the Guadalquivir below Seville. The fiery Eridanus, deprived of its tribute of melting snow, looked quite calm and good-natured for the moment.

The River Po separates Romagna from the Lombardo-Venetian states, and Customs awaits you on exit from the ferry. One tends to complain a great deal about the Italian Customs and the endless vexations associated with them. I confess they have always leafed through our meagre luggage with less meticulousness, certainly, than would have been shown by the French Customs on such occasions; it is true that we always rendered up the keys with graceful insouciance and displayed our passport, whenever we were requested to do so, with the celerity and politeness of the monkey *Pacolet* (*See Gérard de Nerval's tale, 'La Main Enchantée'*)

The Romagnola Customs, after having carelessly rumbled our shirts and socks, and finding that we carried no literature other than a Guide Richard (*travel guide*), a superlatively benign and scarcely subversive book, closed our trunk with magnanimity, and permitted us in the most lenient manner possible, to continue our journey.

In the carriage we had the company of two rather elderly priests, large, fat, short, with oily yellow complexions, and shaved beards whose bluish tones rose to the cheekbones, and who unknowingly wore the costume of *Basilio* in Beaumarchais' *The Marriage of Figaro*, as exaggerated a caricature as those the theatre-directors choose to present on stage. Among us ecclesiastical dress has almost disappeared. Priests in France secularise themselves as much as is possible; very few, since the revolutions of July 1830 and February 1848, wear a cassock, openly, in the street. A wide-brimmed hat, clothes of a black antique cut, long frock coats, a cape of a sombre colour, produce a mixed appearance, somewhere between religious and modern dress, like to that of a Quaker, or a serious fellow carefully attired. They are priests only by stealth, and it is only in church that they don priestly regalia. In Italy, on the contrary, they sit back and relax in character, take the upper hand, and are everywhere at home,

flourishing their handkerchiefs amply, blowing their noses and coughing loudly, as people to whom all respect is due, and who must not be interfered with.

They had taken the best seats in the carriage, which we had yielded to them with the deference owed to their age and condition, and spread themselves generously, even though they had usurped them without the slightest word of apology and the slightest concern for our pleasure and comfort. It is true that we were in the Papal States, where the priest reigns as an absolute master, possessing the keys to both heaven and earth, to the other world and this one, and able to damn you, hang you, and destroy you, body and soul. The awareness of this enormous power, the greatest ever wielded, grants the priests of that country a security, poise, and masterful and sovereign ease of which we have no idea in the countries of the North.

Our two priests, for that was probably their rank in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, exchanged rare and mysterious words with each other with that reserve and prudence which a priest never abandons before secularists; or they slept; or muttered the Latin of their breviary from volumes with brown covers, the red-lettered sections separated by bookmarks; I cannot believe that, throughout the whole journey, they chose even once to look at the landscape beyond the carriage; did they know and fear the distractions of the outside world, the charm of eternal Nature behind which hides the great god Pan of antiquity, whom the Catholics of the Middle Ages persisted in viewing as the Devil?

These companions, certainly respectable but whose dull chill froze us, we parted from at Ferrara. Those pale faces, those black clothes made our vehicle resemble something like a funeral carriage, and we watched them leave with pleasure.

Ferrara rises alone, amidst a level tract of countryside which is prosperous rather than picturesque. When ones enter via the main street which leads to the square, the appearance of the city is imposing and monumental. A palace with a grand staircase occupies a corner of its vast terrain; it must serve as courthouse or town house, because people of all classes enter and exit its wide doors.

As we wandered the street, satisfying our curiosity at the expense of our appetite, and stealing from the time allotted to our lunch forty minutes in which to feast our eyes and fulfil our duties as a traveller, a strange apparition suddenly appeared before us, as unexpected as a phantom at midday ever is: it was a kind of spectre, masked in black, its head engulfed in a black hood, the body draped in a cloak, or rather a purple domino bordered with red, and with a red cross on the shoulder, a yellow copper crucifix hanging from its neck, and a red belt round its waist; this figure was silently shaking a small wooden box, a portable chest, which emitted the clinking of coins.

This scarecrow, whose eyes alone, seen shining through the holes in the mask, were alive, rattled its treasury in front of us a few times, into which, terrified, we let a handful of loose change flow, without knowing for what charity this lugubrious beggar was collecting. He continued on his way without saying a word, accompanied by a sinister, funereal, and metallic tinkle of coins, holding out his box into which everyone hastened to bury a handful of pennies.

We asked what Order this ghost, more frightening than the monks and ascetics of Francisco de Zurbarán's paintings, belonged to, who thus brought the terror of nocturnal visions to the

pure light of day and realised in the street a nightmare of troubled sleep. We were told that he was a penitent of the Confraternity of Death, begging in order to fund masses and biers for those poor devils who were going to be executed by firing squad that day; brigands, or republicans, of that we learnt no more. Such penitents take upon themselves the sad and charitable mission of accompanying the tortured and condemned to their death, supporting them in their supreme anguish, removing their mutilated bodies from the scaffold, laying them in their coffins, and providing them with Christian burial. They are citizens who dedicate themselves, out of feelings of pity, to these painful functions and thus bring a tender element, though veiled and masked, to the implacable and cold immolations of justice. These spectres defend the victims, to some extent, from sight of the executioner. It is a timid protest on behalf of Humanity. Often these charitable attendants on the scaffold feel the pain of the condemned, and are more troubled than the victims themselves.

This is not the place to discuss the legitimacy of the death penalty; voices which gain more attention than mine have developed, with great eloquence, the logical reasons for and against. But, given that this dreadful legal tragedy is to be upheld, it seems to me that the staging (please forgive the word) must be as fearsome as possible. It is not a matter of skilfully preventing the culprit comprehending their immediate fate, an operation which in no way improves the business, but a matter of setting a terrible example which will act on the imagination and deter crime. Whatever dismal spectacle can increase the effect of this bloody drama and impress it on the depths of the spectators' memories in formidable form, must, in my opinion, be implemented. It is necessary that physical terror combine with moral terror.

Imagine for a moment these purple-robed Claude Frollo's (*see Victor Hugo's 'Notre Dame de Paris'*) holding burning candles in their hands, walking in double line beside the ashen-faced condemned! 'That's out of an Ann Radcliffe novel, it's pure melodrama', serious thinkers will say: possibly so. But then what is the point of cutting off heads, if it terrifies no one? One must avoid hiding from realities, if one wishes them to produce the desired effect; a torment that terrifies is less hideous than a 'civilised' torment deprived, by mechanics and philanthropy, of its dreadful poetry. But enough of this unpleasant subject; let us return to less sombre matters.

Italy has largely retained the methods of *Doctor Sangrado* (*see Alain-René Lesage's novel 'Gil Blas'*), and the ilk, whose system, developed in kitchen-Latin in Molière's play *The Imaginary Illness*, has not yet been done away with; this I say without disrespect to true medical talent. There are in the Peninsula quite numerous examples of Molière's doctors, *Purgon*, *Diafoirus*, *Macroton*, and *Desfonandrès*, and many another in the style of Molière; one is bled white for the slightest indisposition; these operations are carried out by barbers; one sees, on their shop signs, paintings of the most delightful surgical fantasies: here, one views a bare arm whose opened vein launches a purple jet as ample as those spurts of harmless beer pouring into the glasses of hussars or young girls on village inn-signs; there, chubby Cupids, crossing a deep blue sky, bear a dish which will receive the blood of a young woman in an *interesting state*, who is smiled upon tenderly by a husband dressed in the costume of the days of the Directory. In these bloodthirsty subjects, the verve of the sign-painters called to create these works does not shy away from a violence of tone and a use of contrast amazing to the colourist.

It was market-day, which produced a degree of excitement in a city which is usually so dreary. We saw nothing characteristic in terms of costume; uniformity pervades everything. The country folk around Ferrara were quite similar to ours, except for the southern brilliance of their black eyes, and a certain pride in their appearance which reminded us that we were in the land of the classics; autumn produce, grapes, pumpkins, peppers, tomatoes, along with coarse pottery, and rustic household utensils, were piled high in the square, where groups of customers and buyers were stationed, along with a few ox-carts much less primitive than those of Spain; a few donkeys loaded with packs of wood waited with patient melancholy for their masters to conclude their business and return; oxen knelt while ruminating peacefully; donkeys tugged, with the tips of their grey lips, at blades of grass springing from cracks in the pavement.

One detail peculiar to Italy was the presence of open-air money changers. Their stalls are of the simplest nature consisting of a stool and a small table where piles of scudi, baiocchi (*one hundredth of a scudo*), and other coins are stored. The money-changer, crouched like a dragon, looks at his little undefended heap of treasure with a worried and yellow eye, filled as he is with the incessant fear of thieves.

Let me note one more very Italian detail: a sonnet in praise of a doctor who had cured his patient of illness had been posted by the thankful convalescent on one of the most visible walls in the square. This sonnet, very flowery and full of mythological references, explained that the Fates had wished to cut the thread of the patient's days, but that the doctor, accompanied by Aesculapius, the god of medicine, and Hygeia, the goddess of health, had descended into Hades to deflect Atropos' scissors, and replenish Clotho's spindle, Lachesis having since then spun a length of thread. We quite liked this ancient and naive way of expressing gratitude.

The cathedral, whose facade overlooks the square, is in that Italian Gothic style so inferior to our Northern Gothic. The porch offers curious details. Its pillars, instead of resting on bases like ordinary columns, are borne by chimeras, in the style of those beside the portal of the Basilica of Santa Justina in Padua, which the columns half-crush, and who take revenge for their pain by tearing captive Ninevite-style lions in their paws. These caryatid monsters seemed to writhe horribly beneath the enormous pressure, their eyes full of pain.



*Ferrara - The cathedral*

The castle of the former Dukes of Ferrara (*Castello Estense*), which can be found a little further on, has a fine feudal appearance. It is a vast cluster of towers, linked by high walls and crowned with lookout-points forming a cornice, emerging from a large moat full of water over which one passes by a well-defended bridge.



*Ferrara - View of Castello Estense from the Bell-Tower of Saint Benedict*

Regarding what I have just said, let none imagine a *burg* like those which bristle on cliffs along the Rhine. A stage-set in the Théâtre Italien, that of Federico Ricci's *Corrado d'Altamura*, or Rossini's *Tancredi* or some other chivalresque opera, would give a fair idea of the castle. The Gothic in Italy has by no means the same physiognomy as at home. No greenish stones, mossy sculptures, or mantles of ivy falling from old broken balconies; no trace of the rust of time, inseparable for us from a building of the Middle Ages: it is a Gothic which, despite its date, seems brand new; a white and pink Gothic, more pretty than serious, somewhat reminiscent, to be honest, of those feudal, troubadour mantelpiece clocks of the Restoration period. The castle of the Dukes of Ferrara, everywhere built from bricks or stones reddened by the sun, shows the vermilion hue of youth which detracts from its attempt at an imposing effect. It looks too much like a setting from melodrama.

In this castle lived the famous Lucrezia Borgia, whom Victor Hugo portrays as a monster, and Ariosto depicts as a model of chastity, grace and virtue; the blonde Lucrezia, who wrote letters breathing the purest love, and of whom Byron possessed a few strands of hair, fine as silk and gleaming like gold. This is where plays by Tasso, Ariosto and Giovanni Guarini were played; where those glittering orgies took place, full of poison and assassination, which characterise that period of learned, artistic Italy, refined and yet villainous.

It is customary to visit, piously, the dungeon where Tasso, mad with love and pain, passed so many years, according to the dubious poetic legend springing from his misfortunes. We lacked the time, and regretted it little. This dungeon, of which I have before me a very accurate drawing, has only its four walls, capped by a low vault. In the background is a grilled window with thick bars and an iron door with large bolts. It is most improbable that, in this dark hole covered with cobwebs, Tasso was able to work and rework his epic, compose his sonnets, and occupy himself with minor details of his clothing, such as the quality of the velvet used to produce his hat and the silk to make his breeches, and of his cuisine, such as the kind of sugar with which he wanted to sprinkle his salad, that which he was given not being fine enough for his liking; nor did we see Ariosto's dwelling, another station on the obligatory pilgrimage. Besides my placing little faith in such inauthentic traditions, such characterless relics, I prefer to seek Ariosto in his *Orlando Furioso*, Tasso in his *Gerusalemme Liberata* or in Goethe's fine dramatic work (*Torquato Tasso*).

Activity in Ferrara is concentrated on the Plaza Nueva, in front of the church and around the castle. Life has not yet abandoned the heart of the city; but as one moves further away, the pulse weakens, paralysis begins, death approaches; silence, solitude and grass invade the streets; one feels that one is wandering in a Thebaid populated by the shades of the past and from which the living flow away in a failing stream. Nothing is sadder than to see the corpse of a city slowly fall to dust beneath the sun and rain. At least we bury human corpses.

After a few hastily-swallowed mouthfuls, we returned to our berline, and headed for Bologna at a moderate pace that was further reduced by the ox-carts, piled high with cut reeds, obstructing the road: they looked like haystacks ambling along, a green wall receding before us, since the oxen completely disappeared beneath their mass. We had to wait until the path widened before overtaking them.

We halted at a vast inn with an arcade open to every breeze, in a place whose name I cannot exactly remember, it being a detail of little significance, but which, in all probability must have been Cento, and we ate a modest repast there, since we were due to arrive in Bologna in the early evening.

Of the route I can scarcely recall anything other than a vast horizon of crops and trees lacking the slightest interest. Perhaps the shadows of evening, which brought on a state of drowsiness and left me less light than the spark of my cigar, hid some beautiful scene from view; but that is unlikely, given the nature of that countryside.

Bologna is a city with arcaded streets, like most of the towns in that part of Italy. These porticos provide convenient shelter from the rain and sun; but they transform the streets into long cloisters, absorb the light, and make the cities look chilly and monastic. One may judge from the Rue de Rivoli, in Paris, the success of this system.

We descended at an inn, where by means of a most moving pantomime we obtained our supper, which included, for our benefit, salami (*a cured meat, usually pork, sausage*), mortadella (*a large sausage of finely ground pork*), bondiola (*shoulder of pork*), and Bologna sausage (*its contents similar to bondiola*), required to provide local colour.

After supper we went for a walk; a droll character, pale and greasy-faced, with a moustache brushing his teeth, decorations in cheap alloy, and a frock coat with loop fastenings, reminiscent of the type worn by Cavalcanti senior in Dumas' novel (*The Count of Monte Cristo*), began to dog our footsteps and followed our every change of pace and direction whenever he detected that same. Bored with this manoeuvre, we told him to walk elsewhere, and did so in a rather brutal way, taking him for a police informer; but he refused to quit us, his claim, and his right, being that of acting as a guide to travellers. Moreover, in that capacity, we belonged to him, and he found it indelicate of us to seek to avoid the royalties he levied on such as ourselves. We were thieves who defrauded him of his revenue, who took the very bread from his mouth, and the coins from his pocket. He had counted on us for the enjoyment of a bottle of Picolit or Aleatico, to buy a scarf for his wife and a ring for his mistress. We were infamous scoundrels for disturbing his plans of ease and domestic happiness. We were setting a bad example to all future travellers, and he was resolved not to back down one iota. He wished to lead us to the diligence, whose lantern shone two steps in front of us, and to Via Galleria where we were. I had never seen a more obstinate and more stupidly opiniated fool. After the most energetic cursing, and cries of: 'To the Devil with you!' fiercely accented on our part, he recommenced his proposal as if we had said not a word, feigning that we would infallibly lose our way, and that he would not suffer it for anything in the world.

Realising that extreme action was required, I took a few steps back, and invoking, mentally, the memory of Hubert Lecour, our teacher of *savate* (*street fighting*) and how to wield a stick, I began to execute a beautiful arabesque with my cane that would have made *Corporal Trimm* (*see Lawrence Sterne's 'Tristram Shandy'*) envious of the complexities of its arcs and knots, and which, in that art, is termed the *rose couverte*.

When the scoundrel saw the rod flash by like lightning, and heard it hiss like a snake, three inches from his nose and ears, he leaned back muttering, and saying that it was not natural for proper travellers to refuse the services of an educated and considerate guide who had led the English about Bologna to their great satisfaction.

Remorse for not having broken his pate returns sometimes, on sleepless nights; but perhaps I would have regretted the good deed, and paid for harming that pumpkin-head. I ask forgiveness of all those travellers whom he may subsequently have annoyed, for not having knocked him senseless. It is an error I will repair, if I ever pass through Bologna again.

We had a letter of recommendation for Giacomo Rossini who, unfortunately, was absent and was not due to return for a few days. It is embarrassing not to have viewed the living face or heard the voice of a great contemporary genius. One should strive as much as is possible, to witness the external forms of beautiful spirits, and when we hear *Semiramide*, *The Barber of Seville*, or *William Tell*, it is painful to me to be able to add no more to my idea of Rossini than the engraving of him by Ary Scheffer, and the statue in marble, with under-straps, which clutters the box-office in the Opéra vestibule (*there is a small bronze copy by Antoine Etex in the Louvre*).

A puerile remark perhaps, but one that I have already made in my travels, is that one can judge the state of advancement of a civilisation by how small the number of barbers is in a given town or city. In Paris, there are very few; in London, there are none not at all. That home

of razors shaves its own beard. Without wanting to accuse Romagna of barbarism, it is fair to say that nowhere have I seen a greater number of barbers than in Bologna; one street alone contained more than twenty in a very limited area, and, what is most amusing, is that the Bolognese city dwellers are frequently bearded.

It is the people of the countryside who form the barber-shops' clientele, the barbers having a very light hand, as our skin can bear witness, without however possessing the dexterity of the Spaniards, the premier barbers in the world since the appearance of *Figaro*.

Leaving the barber's shop, we chose and followed a street at random which led us, suddenly, to the square (*Piazza di Porta Ravennana*) in which the Torre degli Asinelli and the Torre della Garisenda, have been tottering for many centuries already, without falling; towers which had the honour of providing Dante with an image. The great poet compares Antaeus bending towards the earth to the Garisenda (*Inferno Canto XXXI*), which proves that its inclination began before the fourteenth century.

These towers, viewed by moonlight, seem the most fantastic in the world; their strange deviation, belying all the laws of statics and perspective, makes one dizzy, and makes all the neighbouring buildings appear out of true. The Torre degli Asinelli is three hundred feet high; its inclination is three and a half feet. This extreme elevation makes it appear spindly, and can only be compared to one of those huge factory chimneys in Manchester or Birmingham. It rises from a crenelated base and has two further crenelated stages, the second less pronounced; an iron chain runs from the pinnacle which surmounts it to the base of the building.

La Garisenda, which is only half the height of the Torre degli Asinelli, is dreadfully out of true and from certain directions seems almost to touch its neighbour on the right. Although it has been standing for more than six hundred years, I preferred not to linger on the side towards which it inclines. It seemed to me that the instant of its ruin had arrived, and I would be crushed beneath the rubble; a moment of childish fear which it is hard for one to escape.

A bizarre and grotesque idea, which illustrates perfectly the extravagant effect of these towers, came to me while looking at them, which I shared with my travelling companion: they are two monuments which drank themselves into intoxication outside the barrier, and have returned home drunk, leaning against each other.

If the glow of the moon allowed us to see the towers of Asinelli and Garisenda, it was insufficient for us to examine the paintings in the museum, which according to the guide-book, include works by the three Carracci (*Annibale, Agostino and Ludovico*), Domenichino (*Domenico Zampieri*), Francesco Albani, and other great masters of the Bolognese school, and we returned, much to our great regret, to lie down on one of those enormous Italian beds, which would easily hold Hop-o'-My-Thumb's six brothers, and the seven daughters of the Ogre, along with their fathers and mothers; you can rest there, pointed in all directions, up, down, or diagonally, without ever falling into the street below.

At four o'clock in the morning we rose, still half-asleep, to mount the Florence stagecoach, and we noticed a gathering of troops. They were preparing to execute some twenty people for political reasons. We left Bologna with the painful impression we had already experienced in

Verona, and Ferrara, and which was awaiting us in Rome: but the thought of crossing the Apennines on a beautiful September day soon dispelled the gloomy feeling!

## Part XXIX: Florence

The *Armida* (see Tasso's '*Gerusalemme Liberata*') of the Adriatic having detained us among her enchanted canals beyond the end of our intended stay, we were finally obliged to leave, despite the non-appearance of *Ubalde* the knight to make us blush at our tardiness by revealing the magical shield of diamond to our eyes; after our brief halts in Padua and Bologna, whose gloominess seemed more so having left Canaletto's enchanted city behind, we headed as directly as possible towards Florence, the Athens of Italy.

We very much regretted not being able to visit, in passing, the Sanctuary of the Madonna of San Luca, near Bologna, a singular building, located on a hill, Monte della Guardia, and to which a corridor leads with, on the one side, a wall that is well over two miles long, and, on the other, six hundred and sixty-six arches framing a marvellous landscape. This immense portico, raised by Bolognese piety, climbs the side of the mountain in over five hundred steps, and conducts travellers and the devout, from the gates of the city to the sanctuary; but, in travelling as in everything else, one has to know how to make sacrifices; if one wants to arrive, one has to choose a course and follow it, while casting a look of regret at what escapes one. To wish to see everything results in seeing nothing; it is enough merely to see something.

The road from Bologna to Florence traverse the Apennines, the backbone of Italy; a backbone, indeed, of which each fleshless mound forms a vertebra. Even on the most seasoned of travellers, those well-accustomed to disappointment, there are certain names which exert a magical influence, that of the Apennines being one; it is a name found in Horace and the ancient authors, which one's study of the classics includes among our first impressions, and it is difficult not to possess a ready-made idea of the Apennines, which viewing the reality singularly contradicts and amends.

The Apennine chain is made up of a series of arid, crumbling, excoriated hillocks; rough mounds, of scabby hills that look like piles of gravel and rubble; none of those gigantic cliffs, arduous peaks clothed with pine-trees, cloudy summits, silvery with snow, glaciers with a thousand glittering crystals, waterfalls where the rainbow reveals its bow, blue lakes like pieces of turquoise where chamois come to drink, or eagles soaring in great arcs against the light; nothing but Nature, poor, dull, and sterile, and seeming even more petty after the Olympian majesties of the Swiss Alps and the romantic horrors of the Gondo gorge of so picturesque and fearful a grandeur.

Certainly, our mania for comparisons is a quirk of the mind, and it is unfair to ask one place to be like another; but I could not help thinking, from the height of my imperial bench-seat atop the coach, which I had imprudently exchanged an interior corner for, so as to be able to examine the country more at ease, of the beautiful Spanish sierras, which no one speaks of and whose neglected beauties are far superior to the Italian slopes, which are vaunted perhaps to excess; I

recalled the journey from Granada to Vélez-Málaga, through the mountains, by a forgotten track over which perhaps not two travellers a year pass, yet which exceeds all one could possibly imagine as regards accidents of form, light and colour.

I thought also about my excursion to Kabylia (*in Algeria*), its mountains gilded by the African sun, its valleys full of oleanders, mimosas, arbutus, and mastic trees, its streams inhabited by little turtles, its Kabyle villages surrounded by fences of cacti, and its horizon of varied serrations dominated ever by the imposing silhouette of the Djurdjura range, after which the Apennines seemed truly mediocre, despite their Classical reputation.

I am not given to repeating that famous paradox uttered in Marseille: 'Freezing in Africa, burning in Russia.' However, I must admit that we were shivering from the cold in our aerial position, despite layers of overcoats and pea-coats to rouse the envy of Joseph Méry, the chilly poet. I had never in Paris, during the most rigorous of winters, clad myself, at any one time, in such a mass of clothing, and yet it was only mid-September, a season we are accustomed to think of as warm and charming under the gentle Tuscan sky; it is true that the elevation of the land cools the air, and that the cold of hot countries feels particularly unpleasant due to the sudden contrast.

It is not with the aim of erecting a monument to our frozen fingers, and chattering teeth, that I record the remark. Whether we were hot or cold on the top of a stagecoach was a matter of small account to the universe; but the observation might prevent some naive and over-confident Parisian quitting Guiseppe Tortoni's Café de Paris on the Boulevard Italiens for Florence, in August, in cotton trousers and a striped cotton hunting-jacket, and encourage him to include in his luggage a tartan plaid, a pilot's overcoat, and a muffler, thus preventing various head and chest colds. The description of our suffering is therefore not personal; it is wholly philanthropic.

The violence of the wind is so great on those bare, peeled slopes, which alternately receive the cool breath of the Mediterranean breezes and those of the Adriatic, that the Grand Duke of Tuscany had a stone wall built, at the highest point of the road, to protect travellers from the icy gusts which might otherwise pierce and overcome them. Those who have felt the mistral at work, at the foot of the Castle of the Popes in Avignon, will understand the usefulness of such a wall. An inscription in the style of a hospice notes this kind attention bestowed by Leopold II, an attention for which we thank him from the bottom of our hearts.

At that point, one leaves Romagna and enters Tuscany; another Customs visit, an inconvenience of such States as these divided into small principalities. One spends one's life opening and closing one's trunk, a monotonous occupation, which ends up infuriating the most phlegmatic of travellers. Fortunately, we had developed a philosophical system prior to this, in response to the Romagnola Customs officers. We threw our key to whoever wished to take it, or left it in the lock, and went off to contemplate the landscape in peace, a facility that the implacable diligence does not always allow. From this point of view, it is perhaps to be regretted that there are not more Customs stations.

Although the road never achieves the abrupt escarpments, and impossible roller-coaster rides, of the passes of Sierra de las Salinas and the Col de la Descarga, in the Pyrenees, the

slopes are often steep enough to require the help of oxen. We always viewed, with pleasure, the arrival of the ox-team, heads bowed beneath the yoke, with their damp muzzles, large peaceful eyes, and powerfully outstretched legs; firstly, they are picturesque in themselves and, secondly, they are always accompanied by a wild and rustic herdsman, often of great stature, with straggling hair, a pointed hat, a brown jacket, and a goad borne aloft like an ancient sceptre; however, there was a further reason for our delight.

I once asked Louis Cabat, the grand-master of our wonderful school of young landscape artists, how, during his excursions, he determined on the choice of the site that he wanted to paint. 'I wander at random', he replied, 'till I hear the frogs croaking. Where there are frogs, the scene is always attractive; frogs mean a pond, fresh grass, green reeds, osiers and willows.'

Our frogs were the oxen. Their appearance means a harsh summit, a high plateau, from which an immense view is suddenly revealed; an azure panorama of plains, mountains, valleys; a horizon strewn with towns and villas, shimmering in shadow and light. Our oxen no more failed us than the frogs did Cabat.

As the slopes of the Apennines begin to tilt towards Florence, the landscape acquires a greater beauty. The herpetetic, warty hillsides disappear or are clothed with vegetation.

Villas begin to appear beside the road, cypresses elevate their black spires, Italian pines display their rounded green parasols; a warmer gentler breeze allows one to half-open one's coat; the olive trees face the air without their sad and gloomy foliage trembling; one senses the stir of pedestrians, horses, carriages, the approach of a great living city, a rare thing in Italy, that ossuary of dead ones.

Night had fallen when we arrived at the San Gallo gate. Our rather meagre lunch, though washed down with passable wine contained in large glass flasks braided with white esparto grass, swallowed on the border of Tuscany, made us strongly desire, despite our usual sobriety, the sign of the *Black Eagle*, *Red Lion*, *Golden Sun*, or *Maltese Cross*, so as to attend, as Rabelais says, '*à cette réparation de dessous le nez*: to that reparation of what's below the nose' which so worried the good *Panurge* (see '*Gargantua and Pantagruel*' Book II: '*Comment Panurge gagnait les pardons*'). Our eyes had consumed the meal for good or ill; but our stomachs had received only one, and then, again, a very meagre one!

Florence is corseted by a girdle of fortifications, and makes difficulties when one comes knocking on her door in the evening. We had to wait a full hour, before the gate, for I know not what meticulous police formalities to conclude, till, at last, the wooden barrier, a kind of peacetime portcullis which blocked the archway, was raised, and the carriage was able to traverse the cyclopean paving stones of Florence. I say cyclopean because, like walls which bear that name, the stones were of unequal shape, arranged at angles, like Chinese-puzzle pieces.

For a city of feasting and pleasure, whose name is perfumed like a bouquet, Florence offered us a strange reception, which might have made more superstitious people recoil at its ill-omened appearance.

In the first street that the coach navigated, we met with an apparition more fearful than that of the cart of the 'Parliament of Death' encountered by the resourceful knight of La Mancha

near El Toboso (*see Cervantes' 'Don Quixote' Part II Chapter XI*); only, here, it was not a question of the enactment of a piece of auto-sacramental theatre, but of a dreadful reality.

Two black lines of masked spectres, carrying resinous torches, from which streams of reddish light escaped amidst thick smoke, were walking, or rather running, before and behind a catafalque carried aloft, which could be vaguely distinguished through the brown fog of that funereal light; one of them was ringing a bell, and all were chanting a prayer for the dead beneath their breath, through *bocca chiusa* (*closed mouths*) behind their masks, in a stifled panting rhythm. Sometimes another black spectre emerged from a house, and hastily joined the dark herd, which quickly vanished at the crossroads. They were a brotherhood of black penitents who, as customary, escorted the coffin.

This dismal vision reminded of me of a poem by Auguste Brizeux, the poet of *Marie* and *Les Bretons*, a Celt naturalised in Florence, which proves to me that he had met like me with an unexpected spectacle of this kind and gained an impression similar to my own. Let me transcribe it here as a complement to my nocturnal sketch:

*With blows, the Bargello's bell resounds.*

*My pale neighbour quits the café.*

*Now ever-louder the tocsin sounds.*

*Another departs... 'What is happening, pray?*

*Dear sir, we are lodged at the very same inn.*

*Why are these people masked, shrouded, in black?'*

*'To bear candles, and carry the dead within.'*

*'Their hands are so white! I'm taken aback.'*

*'Dear traveller, none can know whom they see;*

*These men are shrouded, and masked, to do good:*

*A labourer, or the Grand Duke it may be.*

*Everyone is a Christian, under the hood!'*

*(Auguste Brizeux: 'Les Frères de la Miséricorde')*

The people of the South, although brooding about death much less than those of the north, since they are constantly distracted by the pleasure of the climate, the spectacle of nature's beauty, and the effects of hotter blood and hotter and livelier emotions, love these processions of dominoed ghosts; for they are seen throughout Italy. The Italians feel the need to give

everything physical form, and to stir the imagination through dramatic spectacle. Not long since, the dead were borne along their faces uncovered; the appearance of those livid, immobile corpses under the cosmetics applied to hide a grimace frozen in agony and the initial process of decomposition, added a further sinister and fantastic effect to those funerals. Now there are only the monks who appear in this manner with robes to shroud them.

A strange thing! In England, the country of Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*, the country where Shakespeare's gravedigger tosses Yorick's skull in the air like a ball; the native land of spleen and suicide; the dead are removed surreptitiously, almost in secret, in a sort of black upholstered carriage at an hour when the streets are deserted, and by circuitous paths; during four or five trips to London, I failed to encounter a single funeral. We fall from life to non-being without transition, and our useless remains are packaged up and hidden away with the greatest possible alacrity. Catholics present their staging of death in a superior manner, and a firm belief in the immortality of the soul diminishes their dread of funeral ceremonies.

We were directed to the hotel New York, on the *lungarno*, near the Carraia bridge, as providing a sufficiently comfortable stay. In fact, we found it to be a large house, run in a more or less English style, where one ate in a civilised fashion, something we had not done for a while. Travellers from other nations are not grateful enough to the English, those great educators of innkeepers, those brave islanders who transport their homeland with them everywhere, in compartmentalised trunks, and who, living in the wealthiest parts of London, such as the City or the West End, have, by deploying their powerful guineas, exclamations of surprise, and opiated judgements, established rump-steak, chops, salmon, boiled vegetables, Indian curries, and a small pharmacy of spicy condiments, such as Guyanese red peppers, West Indian pimentos, Harvey's sauce, anchovy sauce, and candied palm buds in vinegar, throughout the globe. Thanks to them, there is no desert island in the most unknown archipelago of Oceania where one cannot find, at any time of day or night, tea, sandwiches, and brandy, as at any tavern in Greenwich.

The meal over, we wandered the city for a while without a guide, according to our usual custom, trusting ourselves to an instinct as regards local topography which prevents our getting lost, even in places only known from a map or a quick glance; we traversed the *lungarno* as far as Ponte Santa Trinita; went down a street, and found ourselves in front of Caffè Doni, Florence's equivalent to Tortoni's in Paris; the carriages stop there when returning from the Cascine promenade, the city's Champs-Élysées, to which folk take iced drinks in their vehicles.

Two tall girls, a little dark of complexion, but quite beautiful, dressed with a sort of elegance, and wearing those Italian straw hats, with fine braid, which one sees so frequently in Paris, and which are so expensive there, rushed towards us with a happy boldness, their hands full of flowers, and soon had made flowerbeds of our vests; every buttonhole of our clothing found itself starred, in the blink of an eye and without our being able to defend ourselves from their assault, with a carnation or a rose. Never was a page-boy at a wedding more adorned. The flower-girls, having spotted a novice, as they say in college, had seized upon their prey and greeted our arrival in their own way. Florence is the city of flowers; there is an enormous market for them; on outings, the seats of the carriages are cluttered with bouquets, flowers rain

on them, the houses are full of flowers, and one climbs the stairways between flowery hedges. They say that in spring the countryside is enamelled with a thousand colours like a Persian carpet. That sight I can only mention as hearsay, since it was autumn.

While in the hands of these girls, we found ourselves addressed by three or four friendly voices as if we had been on the Boulevard des Italiens, in Paris.

The friend (*Eugène Piot*) with whom I had made our long and beautiful trip to Spain, in 1840, still one of my dearest memories, was in Florence, where was preparing the material for his superb photographic album, *L'Italie monumentale (The Monuments of Italy, 1851-53)*, of which we were able to admire the first prints delivered to the publisher, Goupil and Vibert, and he cordially shook our hands between the relentless pair of flower girls. Émile Loubon, the painter from Marseille; Strürler, a German artist of the Friedrich Overbeck school, whose painting, exhibited at the Salon a few years ago, you will certainly not have forgotten, representing the death of Sweyn Forkbeard, the work recalling the paintings, in tempera, of the twelfth century triptychs; and G. the philologist, scholar, and mysterious well of knowledge, who had garnered for himself alone a Benedictine erudition; greeted us cheerfully, offered us cigars, and suggested iced drinks.

We were amidst a sea of knowledge, and, elbows on table, noses in a dense cloud of smoke, began one of those conversations which can only be held from the Rue de la Grange Batelière to the Rue du Mont-Blanc (*now the Rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin*), amongst people who, like artists, critics, philosophers, and poets, have travelled the whole world of art. However beautiful the climate, however rich a country may be in palaces, paintings, and statues, nothing replaces those serendipitous conversations, full of ellipses and innuendoes, in which a single word raises swarms of ideas, truth becomes acute paradox, everything is touched on without seeming effort, and a joke has unknown depths, which are the despair of strangers, overhearing them, who had thought that they understood French.

They all advised on the best method of viewing Florence, one saying that a few days were sufficient, another claiming, on the contrary, that it took more than a year to see only a fraction of the riches contained in that city, the cradle of Tuscan art. To this we replied that our time was limited, that we needed to visit Rome and Naples before the weather turned adverse, and that our intention was not to create a work of erudition, but to 'take' with the pen a few 'daguerreotype' views of the objects, sites, monuments, works of art, costumes and oddities, which struck our attention most forcefully, and that our talents were insufficient for more, since, in this hour of conversation, tasks were outlined whose accomplishment would require a whole lifetime.

We returned to the hotel *New York*, and as soon as day broke, we set our noses to the window for a while to study the perspective that unfolded before our eyes.

Between two stone quays, flowed the River Arno, clouded and yellow, barely covering half of its bed, whose muddy bottom appeared in places, studded with rubble, shards, and rubbish of all kinds. The magic of those Italian names which we find enshrined in the verses of the poets, is such that their sonorous syllables always awaken in the mind an idea other than that which reality presents. We imagined the Arno, despite ourselves, as a river with clear water,

and flowery green shores, towards which marble stairs descended, and which boats, starred with lanterns, traversed back and forth at evening, trailing Turkish tapestries in the current, sheltering madly amorous couples beneath their silk canopies, as musicians roused the waters.

The truth is that the Arno is rather a stream than a river, flowing intermittently according to the amount of rain or not, sometimes dry, sometimes overflowing and, in Florence itself, resembles the Seine between the Pont de l'Hôtel Dieu and the Pont Neuf, more than anything else.

A few fishermen, in the water up to their knees, alone animated the scene, since the river, because of its shallow and variable depth, only carries punts, which is all the more annoying given that the sea is not far off, the Arno entering it after traversing Pisa.

The houses facing us on the opposite quay were tall, sober, and not particularly interesting from an architectural point of view; a few domes and towers of distant churches alone broke their horizontal line; one could see, beyond the roofs of the buildings, the hill of San Miniato, with its church and cypress trees, a name which had lodged in my mind, though I had never been to Florence, through reading Alfred de Musset's play *Lorenzaccio*, in which the fifth scene's opening stage instruction reads: *Before the Church of San Miniato at Mount Olivet*. Why did this insignificant detail remain in my memory after so many years, when I had forgotten so many more important things? Let those say who are able to unfold the mysterious convolutions of our poor human brains.

To our right the beautiful Ponte Santa Trinita, designed by the architect Bartolomeo Ammannati, spanned the river, its three slender elliptical arches offering less of an obstacle to the water during serious flooding. It is adorned with statues of the four seasons, which, from a distance, produce a fairly monumental effect.

To our left was the Ponta alla Carraia, the oldest bridge in Florence, since its foundations date back to the twelfth century. Carried away a number of times by flooding, it was rebuilt by Ammannati, whom I mentioned above, in 1557.

A rather odd legend is attached to this bridge. In May 1504, news of a strange proclamation spread throughout Florence, informing the inhabitants that 'those who desire news of the other world need only visit the Carraia bridge.'

This singular invitation, equal to the vaunted attractions, in our age, of all the English advertising posters combined, attracted a huge crowd to the bridge, whose piers were of stone and arches of wood.

The idea of Hell presented years earlier in Dante's great poem (*the 'Divina Commedia'*) occupied all minds; artists had covered the walls of churches and cloisters with diabolical compositions; fantastic images which Michelangelo later summarised, with supreme mastery, in his *Last Judgment*.

It was thus a representation of the Inferno which was staged on the river after the fanciful and extravagant designs of Buonamico Buffalmacco. The Arno, temporarily burdened like the rivers Phlegethon and Cocytus of myth, was furrowed with black boats in the style of Charon's barge, which displayed the shades of the dead being welcomed by devils with horns, claws,

wings, and coiled tails, in the attire required for their task, with great blows of their pitchforks, along with a blend of pagan and Christian torments, boiling cauldrons, griddles, wheels, pincers, strappadoes, and blazing pyres, presenting every variety of torture, believable and unbelievable, amidst fierce flames, smoke, Greek fire, and other devices. Huge hellish faces in the fashion of the Middle Ages opened and closed, revealing, through a reddish glow, a host of the damned, taunted and abused by demons.

This bizarre spectacle was given by the inhabitants of the village of San Frediano, for the entertainment of the townspeople of Florence, who paid dearly for it, since the bridge broke under the crowd's weight; a large number of spectators fell into the water and the flames, at once drowning or burning themselves to death, and obtained, as the announcement had promised, direct news of the other world by travelling there themselves.

I am told that an event of this kind almost occurred in Paris, during the Empire, with regard to a firework display from the Pont Royal. At the moment when the first rockets were fired, the crowd stationed on the Pont des Arts all leaned towards the balustrade, and the floor of the bridge lifted; a huge leap backwards was executed by the gathering, with an agility caused by fear, restoring the deck's balance, the Parisians of 1810 faring far better than the Florentines of 1304. After the disaster in Florence, the bridge was rebuilt entirely in stone, and almost in the form seen today (*the bridge was destroyed in 1944, and subsequently rebuilt in stone, in traditional style*).

The general aspect of Florence, contrary to the prior idea we had of it, was gloomy. The streets are narrow; the houses, tall and with dark facades, lack the bright southern cheerfulness we expected to find there. This city of pleasure, to which wealthy and elegant Europe makes its summer retreat, has a sullen and reticent appearance; its palazzos resemble prisons or fortresses; each house seems to be entrenching itself, or defending itself against the street; massive, serious, solid architecture, with sombre arches, retained all the mistrust of the Middle Ages and seem to be awaiting some attack at the hands of the Pazzi or the Strozzi.

Thus, Florence, in which we had imagined ourselves reclining, beneath an azure sky, before a backcloth of white buildings, while nonchalantly breathing the fragrance of the red lily of its coat of arms, proved rather to be an austere matron, half hidden in her black veil, like one of the three Fates, as depicted by Michelangelo.

### **Part XXX: The Piazza della Signoria**

The Greeks had a particular word to designate the central and most important location in a country or city: ὀφθαλμός (*ophthalmós, the eye*). Does not the eye, indeed, give life, intelligence and meaning to the human face, expressing our thoughts and seducing us by its luminous magnetism. Transferring this idea from living nature to unliving nature, by a bold but just metaphor, is there not in every city a place that is its summation, where its movement and life culminate, where the scattered features comprising its particular character are clearer, and

more readily evident, where its historical memories solidify in monumental form, so as to produce a striking, and unique ensemble, like an eye in the city's visage?

Every great capital has its eye; in Rome, it is the Campo Vaccino; in Paris, the Boulevard des Italiens; in Venice, St. Mark's Square; Madrid, the Prado; London, the Strand; Naples, the Via Toledo. Rome is more Roman, Paris more Parisian, Venice more Venetian, Madrid more Spanish, London more English, Naples more Neapolitan, in that privileged place than anywhere else. The eye of Florence is the Piazza della Signoria: a most beautiful eye!

Indeed, remove that square, and Florence no longer makes sense; Florence would be another city. It is therefore with the piazza that every traveller must begin their visit; and, even if that was not one's previous intention, the waves of pedestrians would carry one there, and the streets lead one there, of their own accord.

One's first sight of the Piazza della Signoria, which produces an effect so graceful, so picturesque, and so complete, leads one to understand immediately the error that modern capitals like London, Paris, and Saint Petersburg perpetrate, which present, under the pretext of being squares with their compact dimensions, immense empty spaces, where all possible modes of adornment fail. I touch on the very reason why the Carrousel and the Place de la Concorde are merely large vacant fields which absorb in vain their fountains, statues, triumphal arches, obelisks, iron candelabra, and gardens. All these embellishments, very pretty on paper, and doubtless very pleasant when seen from the basket of a balloon, are well-nigh lost to the spectator who can in no way grasp the whole, their height being a mere five or six feet from the ground.

A square, to produce a beautiful effect, must not be too large; for beyond a certain limit the gaze becomes diffuse and the effect is lost. It must also be lined with varied buildings, of differing elevation. The construction must be of an elegant height and circumscribe, advantageously, the space; one can then view all its details. That is the difference between it and a plateau, dressed like a plateau, mere flat ground over which one has to walk to discover the nature of the place.

Florence's Piazza della Signoria, fulfils all the correct conditions of architectural picturesqueness, effective layout, and variety; lined with buildings regular in themselves but different from one another, it pleases the eye, without boring one by possessing a coldly symmetrical appearance.

The Palazzo della Signoria, or the Palazzo Vecchio, the old palace, which, attracts immediate attention by its imposing mass and severe elegance, occupies a corner of the square, instead of the centre. This unusual, though happy, situation in our opinion, even if it is a matter of regret to those who only find beauty in architecture of geometric regularity, is not fortuitous; it has a very Florentine reason.



*Florence - The Palazzo Vecchio*

To obtain perfect symmetry, would have obviated building on the ruins of houses once owned by those rebellious and proscribed Ghibellines, the Uberti; which the Guelph faction, then all-powerful, desired the architect Arnolfo di Cambio to do, so that the houses might never be rebuilt in that place. Scholars dispute this tradition; I do not, but will not discuss the value of their objections here. What is certain, is that the Palazzo Vecchio gains much from the singularity of its placement, in leaving space for the large fountain of Neptune, and the equestrian statue of Cosimo I de' Medici.

The word fortress is more applicable to the Palazzo Vecchio than any other; it is a large mass in stone, devoid of columns, and pediment, and of no particular architectural order, shaped like an enormous keep, elongated widthwise to a rectangle, serrated with crenelations, and topped by a lookout-storey projecting outwards; on the lower levels, ogival windows

pierce, like loopholes, the thick walls of the massive building, while on the right, like a turret at the centre of a citadel, rises a high bell-tower also crenelated, bearing a clock-dial on the side facing the square.

Time has gilded the walls with beautiful red and vermilion tones which are highlighted wonderfully against the pure blue of the sky, and the whole building has a fierce, proud, romantic look which agreed well with the idea I had formed of this old palace of the Signoria, witness, since the fourteenth century, when it was constructed, to so many intrigues, tumultuous and violent events, and crimes. The battlements of the palazzo, square cut, show the height it was raised to by the Guelph faction; the bifurcated battlements of the belfry indicate a turnaround in their fortunes and the coming to power of the Ghibelline faction. The Guelphs and Ghibellines hated each other so violently that they broadcast their factional allegiance everywhere, in the style of their clothes, the cut of their hair, their weapons, and the design of their fortifications, fearing nothing so much as being confused with one another, and differentiating themselves as much as they could; their members had particular signs when greeting each other, like the Freemasons, and the members of the Medieval Guilds. Thus, one can recognise, by the characteristic denticulation of the old palaces of Florence, the faction to which their ancient owners belonged; the city walls are wholly crenelated in the Guelf manner, while the tower on the ramparts, opposite the post road, has Ghibelline crenelations cut in dovetails.

Within the long row of arches which support the summit of the Palazzo Vecchio are frescoed the coats of arms of the people of the city and republic of Florence. After the expulsion of the Duke of Athens (*Walter VI, Count of Brienne, in 1343*), whose romantic title recalls Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Florence was divided into four districts under sixteen banners (*gonfaloni*), four per district, which each bore arms, of which the heraldic description follows: the Sante Spirito district bore a silver dove above rays of gold on an azure field; its standards were emblazoned thus: Gonfalone Nicchio, two sets of emblems both on an azure field; the upper, in chief, that of the citizens, being a label gules of fleurs-de-lys or on an azure field, the same label being repeated on the banners of all four districts; the lower, in base, being five red scallop shells on a field argent; Drago, a dragon vert on a field gules; Scala, a ladder argent on a field gules; Sferza, a scourge sable on a field argent. The Santa Croce neighbourhood was represented by a cross or on a field argent; its standards bore: Gonfalone Carro, a wheel or on an azure field; Ruote, a cross gules within three circles sable; Bue, a bull sable on a field or; Leone Nero, a lion sable on a field argent. The Santa Maria Novella district had for its badge a sun in splendour on a field azure; its banners bore the following coats of arms: Leone Blanco, a lion rampant argent on a field azure; Vipera, a viper vert on a field or; Leone Rosso, a lion rampant gules on a field argent; Leocorno, a unicorn-lion or on an azure field. The San Giovanni district was symbolised by an octagonal temple, similar to the Florence Baptistery, or on a field azure, with a key or to right and left; the gonfaloni bore: Chiavi, two keys gules on a field or; Vaio, in chief gules, in base vair argent and azure: the downward pointing vair-bells argent, the upward azure; Draco, a dragon vert on a field or; Leone Doro, a lion or on a field azure.

One can see that all these charges form what one might call visual equivalents of the names (known as *canting arms*). The Middle Ages loved these rebuses, of which, in France, the heraldic wild cherry-tree (*créquier*) of Créquy, the apple-tree (*pommier*) of Pommereuil, and the walnut-tree (*noyer*) of Nogaret may give one an idea.

May the reader forgive me this litany of blazons; but I thought it necessary to historicise my description of the Palazzo Vecchio, and set them down, as they are to be seen, beneath the little arches of the upper level, with all their charges and colours; they are, moreover, one of the characteristic features of the appearance, part-communal, part-feudal of this palace, town hall, and fortress.

The building has at its base, a few steps which formerly formed a kind of platform from the top of which magistrates and agitators harangued the people.

Two marble colossi, *Hercules*, slayer of *Cacus*, by Baccio Bandinelli, and *David*, conqueror of *Goliath*, by Michelangelo (*the sculpture is now a copy, the original having been removed to the Accademia*), display their secular victories by the doorway, like two gigantic sentinels that the authorities have neglected to relieve of their duty.

Bandinelli's *Hercules* and Michelangelo's *David* have been the object of criticism and admiration respectively, which has seemed to me a little unfair. In my opinion, the Bandinelli has been undervalued and the Michelangelo over-praised.

There is a haughty pride to the *Hercules*, a fierce energy, an air of grandeur, which denotes the first-rate artist; Florentine exaggeration never exceeded that grandiloquent violence and extravagant anatomy. The bent neck of *Cacus* and the network of muscles that lift his monstrous shoulders show amazing strength and power, and Michelangelo himself, when he viewed these carved pieces separately, could not help but give his approval. The torso of *Hercules* was much criticised by the artists and public of the time. All the details, it is true, are excessively pronounced: the deltoids, the pectorals, the mastoid bones, the serratus muscle, and the projections of the ribs stand out in extreme relief; the torso is stripped down to the last degree; the artist neglected to cover the projections and bumps, or rather chose not to do so. It has been compared to a bag full of pine cones. This reproach, which has some truth to it, could be directed at many other Florentine artists, not excluding the great Buonarrotti.

Baccio Bandinelli had an amusing dispute, before the Grand Duke, with the boastful Benvenuto Cellini, a great bully as regards other artists, a Captain Fracasse (*see Gautier's novel of that title*) of the goldsmiths. 'Find another world, for I'll hound you out of this one,' cried Benvenuto, hand on hip, like *Capitan Spaventa* of the *Commedia dell Arte*, 'Let me know beforehand, so I've time to confess and make a will; because I don't want to die a mere brute, like you,' replied Bandinelli. Their dialogue, consisting of insults alternating between those of the knave and the scholar, entertained the Grand Duke greatly. Such displays of animosity are, ultimately, better for art than the sycophantic hypocrisies employed by modern artists. Passion is good and endorses belief; moreover, Benvenuto Cellini does justice in his *Memoirs* to Bandinelli's talent, granting him an honourable place among contemporary celebrities.

Michelangelo's *David*, apart from the disadvantage that it represents in gigantic form a Biblical hero who was notoriously small in stature, seemed to me a little heavy and

commonplace, a rare defect in an artist of such rigorous elegance; here one has a tall, strong, stocky, fleshy, and healthy youth, bastioned by strong pectoral muscles, equipped with monstrous biceps, a strong fellow out of the market waiting for a bag to be set on his back. The treatment of the marble is remarkable and, all in all, it is a good study that would do credit to any other sculptor than Michelangelo; but it lacks the Olympian and formidable mastery which characterises the work of that well-nigh superhuman artist; though it should be said that he was not entirely free to create as he wished: he carved the *David* from an enormous block of Carrara marble, extracted years earlier by Francesco di Simone da Fiesole, who had tried to carve a colossus without success. Michelangelo, then aged twenty-nine, resumed the work, and readily found a gigantic form within Francesco's ill-shaped efforts; some defects of proportion in the limbs, and the paucity of marble and visible striations on the shoulders, indicate the difficulties the great sculptor must have experienced in accomplishing the singular tour de force of producing a statue from another's leavings; Michelangelo alone could dream of doing so.

Two other carved statues in the form of herms, one by Bandinelli, the other by his pupil Vincenzo de Rossi, served formerly as posts from which the chain was suspended which barred the doorway; that by Vincenzo represents a man whose legs are sheathed in the trunk of an oak tree, symbolising Tuscan strength and magnanimity; that by Bandinelli represents a woman, her head topped by a crown, her legs sheathed in a laurel-tree, symbolizing the supremacy in the arts and graces of that fortunate realm. Vandalism, perpetrated by bored sentries, has sculpted with bayonets the sexes of these two Hermes.

Above the door, two lions support a radiant cartouche, with this inscription (*concealed in 1851 by modifications*):

JESUS CHRISTUS, REX FLORENTINI POPULI,  
S. P. DECRETO ELECTUS.

*(Jesus Christ, King of the Florentine populace,  
So elected by decree of the Senate and People)*

Christ was, in fact, elected king of Florence on the proposal of Niccolò Capponi of the Grand Council, with the idea of ensuring public tranquillity, since Christ could not be supplanted or replaced by any other. This ideal presidency did not prevent the Republic from being overthrown.

The courtyard which one enters through this door was brought to its current state by Michelozzo di Bartolommeo. The Renaissance style is evident in his design. Elegant columns supporting arches form a patio like those in the midst of Spanish houses; a fountain constructed to Giorgio Vasari's design by the sculptor Francesco del Tadda, by command of Cosimo I de Medici, occupies the centre and completes the resemblance; the basin is of porphyry; water gushes from the snout of a dolphin strangled by a beautiful child, a bronze by Andra del

Verrocchio; the arches above are frescoed with depictions of trophies, the spoils of victory, weapons of war, and prisoners chained to medallions bearing the coat of arms of Florence and the Medici.

One of the most curious rooms of the Palazzo Vecchio is the large salon, a room of enormous size with which a legend is associated. When the Medici were driven out of Florence in 1494, Fra Girolamo Savonarola, who led a popular movement, had the idea of building an immense room in which a council of a thousand citizens would elect the magistrates and would regulate the affairs of the Republic. The architect Simone del Pollaiuolo, known as Il Cronaca, was charged with this task and acquitted it with such marvellous celerity that Brother Savonarola spread a rumour that angels of heaven descended at night to aid the masons, and continued the efforts which had been interrupted. The idea of these angels plastering, and carrying hods, is quite in accord with the style of legends of the Middle Ages, and would provide a charming subject for some naive painter of the school of Johann Overbeck, or Kaspar Hauser. In this rapid construction, Cronaca deployed, if not all his genius, at least all his skill; the structure and combined strength of the framework which supports this large ceiling, of enormous weight, are rightly admired, and the result has often been consulted by other architects.

When the Medici returned and transferred their residence to their palazzo in Via Larga (*Via Camillo Cavour*), which they occupied, Cosimo wanted to change the council room in the Palazzo della Signoria into a courtroom, and charged the presumptuous Baccio Bandinelli, whose drawings had seduced him, with the various important arrangements and rearrangements; but the sculptor had assumed too much; despite his unquestioned talent as an architect, and despite the help of Baccio d'Agnolo, whom he called to his aid, he laboured for ten years without being able to escape from the difficulties he had himself created. It was Vasari who raised the ceiling, completed the work and decorated the walls with a series of frescoes which can still be viewed there, representing different episodes in the history of Florence, the battles, and the defeats in which the city fell, all clothed in the dress of antiquity, and interspersed with allegories. These frescoes, created with intrepid and learned mediocrity, offer all the usual commonplaces of bulging muscles and anatomical tours de force, in use at that time among the troupe of contemporary artists. Though it is the story of Florence, you would think you were seeing ancient Romans laying siege to Veii, or some other primitive city of ancient Latium, and the frescoes seem like gigantic illustrations from *De Viris Illustribus*. This false style is shocking. What do classical helmets, breastplates with straps, and naked warriors have to do with Florence's wars against Pisa and Siena?

A large number of statues alone or in groups set in niches, or on pedestals, decorate this room; I will refrain from describing them one after the other, an endless task; but I will mention the *Adam and Eve*, by Baccio Bandinelli, one of the best works of that master; the *Giovanni de' Medici* and the *Alessandro*, he being the first Duke of Florence assassinated by that Lorenzaccio (*Lorenzino de' Medici*) who provided the poet Alfred de Musset with a wholly Shakespearean subject for his play of that name, both being works by that same Baccio; the *Virtue Triumphant Over Vice*, created by Giovanni da Bologna, known as Giambologna; and especially the *Genius of Victory*, by Michelangelo, intended for the mausoleum of Pope Julius

II, of such sublime pride, so grandiose an attitude, such superb disdain, that it makes all the other sculptures appear flat, ugly, commonplace, bourgeois, trivial, almost abject, however fine they might be. The *Alessandro* and the *Giovanni de' Medici*, despite their fierce and imperious air, appear much like the figures of little boys before this terrible and triumphant statue. Michelangelo's creations possess the power to eclipse all works of art that venture near them, and reduce them to nothingness.

I noted, in passing, a pair of beautiful marquetry doors by Benedetto de Maiano, who framed, in exquisitely tasteful panels, portraits of Dante and Petrarch, executed in wood of different hues: it is a masterwork of difficulties vanquished.

A motif that often recurs in the ornamentation of ceilings and cornices, is that of children who play with a racket and red balls, an allusion to the coat of arms of the Medici, which is, as we know: or, five balls in orle gules, with, in chief, a larger roundel of the arms of France (*azure, three fleurs-de-lis or*). Those mischievous folk, who would like to see the balls as pills, because of the name Medici (*doctor*), are wrong: they are balls, an interpretation that suffices to explain the motto: *Percussa resiliunt* ('*When struck they rebound*'). This is pretty much all you can see of the Palazzo della Signoria; the ancient rooms to which historic memories are attached are cluttered with administrative paperwork and no longer offer anything interesting to the eye.

I spoke, earlier, of the fact that colossal dimensions are scarcely necessary to produce an effect in architecture. The Loggia dei Lanzi, that jewel of the Piazza della Signoria, consists of a portico composed of four arches three on the front, one on the side facing the Uffizi Gallery. It is a monument in miniature; but the harmony of the proportions is so perfect that one experiences a feeling of well-being on viewing it. The neighbouring Palazzo della Signoria, with its compact mass and robust construction, admirably highlights the elegant slenderness of its arches and columns. Despite the opinion of Michelangelo, when responding to the Grand Duke who consulted him on the matter, that, in order to adorn the square, it would be best to continue the Loggia d'Orcagna, or d'Orgagna since that is the Italian spelling of the name, I think that the Loggia is fine as it is, and would in no way benefit from being repeated like the arcades of the Rue de Rivoli. Its principal charm is that, itself symmetrical, it observes the rule of varied sequencing amidst the buildings which accompany it, and with which it contrasts; this diversity gives the square a cheerful appearance which would swiftly induce boredom if its arches had been repeated on all sides.

Orcagna (*Andrea di Cione di Arcangelo*), like Giotto, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, and all the great polymaths of those blissful times when bourgeois envy did not restrict genius to one narrow specialty, pursued with equal facility, the triple career of architect, painter and sculptor. The Loggia, the frescoes of the Camposanto in Pisa, the statue of the Virgin, and various tombs in the churches of Florence, demonstrate his superiority in each of these roles (*the attribution of a number of these works is in doubt*). Thus, with legitimate and naive pride he placed at the foot of his paintings the inscription: *Orgagna sculptor*, and, at the base of his sculptures: *pictor*.

The columns of the Loggia possess capitals of a Gothic, and somewhat fanciful, Corinthian order, where the regularities advised by Vitruvius are not observed; which detracts not at all

from their grace and happy proportions. A pierced balustrade, akin to that surrounding a terrace, crowns the building, in a delicate and light manner. The name Loggia dei Lanzi comes from an old barracks of the lansquenets (*German mercenaries*), not far distant from it at the time when the foundations were laid, during the Duke of Athens' tyrannical rule. The purpose of the building was to shelter the citizens during sudden downpours, and to allow them to discuss their affairs or those of the State under cover. It was beneath this gallery, raised a few feet above the surface of the square, that the magistrates were invested with their powers, knights were dubbed, and government decrees were announced, and from which the people were harangued, as if from the heights of a tribune.

The authorities would do well to raise, in our rainy cities of the North, where passers-by are exposed twenty times a day, and at all seasons, to sudden bad weather, buildings akin to Florence's Loggia dei Lanzi, La Lonja de la Seda in Valencia, or the Forum Boarium in Rome and the former Graecostasis there; in addition to pedestrians, these porticos could house, like that of Orcagna, masterpieces of ancient or modern sculpture, and provide work for sculptors as well as architects.

The Loggia is a kind of open-air museum: the *Perseus* by Benvenuto Cellini, the *Judith* by Donatello, and *The Rape of the Sabine Woman* by Giambologna, are framed by its arches. Six Roman statues of women line the rear wall. Within hexafoils on the front façade, are statues representing the cardinal virtues, designed by Agnolo Gaddi, and executed by Giovanni d'Ambrogio (*Justice and Prudence*), and Jacopo di Piero Guidi and Giovanni Fetti (*Fortitude and Temperance*). On the side facing the Palazzo Vecchio, are the three monastic virtues, again designed by Gaddi, carved by Jacopo di Piero Guidi (*Faith and Hope*), and by that same artist with Piero di Giovanni Tedesco (*Charity*). Two lions, one ancient, the other modern and carved by Flaminio Vacca, which are almost as fine as the Greek lions of the Arsenale of Venice, adorn the steps.

The *Perseus* may be regarded as Benvenuto Cellini's masterpiece, he being an artist about whom we talk so much in France, while knowing almost nothing about him. The bronze statue, a little mannered in its pose, like all the works of the Florentine school, which pursued to excess its search for the sense of line and for interesting novelties of movement, possesses a most seductive and youthful grace. Its composed attitude, doubtless inferior to the simplicity of the ancients, still offers great charm; it is both elegant and haughty.

The young hero has just sliced the head from the unfortunate Medusa, whose crumpled body, with artistic boldness, makes a platform for the victor of its bundle of limbs convulsed by final agony. Perseus, turning away his face, in which compassion mingles with horror, holds his sword, with its curved hook, in one hand, and with the other raises that head which turned the living to stone, lifeless and immobile amidst its hair full of writhing serpents.

The pedestal, another masterpiece, is adorned with bas-reliefs relating to the story of Andromeda, with figurines and foliage in which the talent of Benvenuto, the sculptor, reappears. Below the figure of a standing Jupiter brandishing his thunderbolt, this threatening inscription may be read:

TE, FILII, SI QUIS LÆSERIT, ULTOR ERO

(Should any hurt you, youth, I shall avenge you)

which applies as well to the artist as to his *Perseus*. This inscription carrying a double-meaning legend seems a warning from the sword-wielding engraver directed at his critics, the act as easily done as said. Without letting oneself be influenced by the threat, one may freely admire the *Perseus* for its heroic grace and delicate slenderness of form. It is a charming statue and a delightful jewel; it is worth all the trouble it cost.

Donatello's *Judith* shows the severed head of Holofernes to the Palazzo della Signoria with a forbidding and quite alarming pride, and fulfils, beneath the Loggia's arcade, the same role as Denis Foyatier's *Spartacus*, opposite the Tuileries Palace, in Paris. Except that Spartacus' protest is mute, while to ensure that of the *Judith* was wholly unambiguous, the plinth was engraved with this not very reassuring inscription: *Exemplum salut publ. cives posuere MCCCCXV (set here by the citizens for the public good, 1415)*. Both statues are in bronze and Benvenuto, in his *Memoirs*, recounts in a dramatic and moving manner all the events involved in casting his *Perseus* and the dreadful anguish he experienced before success crowned his endeavours. To liquefy the metal, which solidified in the crucible and refused to pour, the artist threw therein all his dishes, increasing the fire's heat with the addition of broken furniture, as, exhausted, panting, consumed with anxious fever, and thinking of his rivals' delight if the operation failed, he prepared to throw himself into the furnace if the mould should burst under the pressure of the bronze. He recounts, also, the rapture, delirium, and triumph he enjoyed at a cordial meal with his students and friends, after the work had emerged radiant and intact from all its trials! They still point out the house in Florence where the *Perseus* was cast.

Benvenuto, who, in his capacity as a goldsmith and sculptor had often laboured for kings, princesses and lords, desired his *Perseus* to win popular applause, so he sealed it firmly to its base to thwart the whim of the Grand Duchess, who wished it to adorn her apartment, he preferring to that sanctuary of wealth its perpetual public exhibition.

*The Rape of the Sabine Woman* gave Giambologna an admirable pretext to deploy his scientific approach to the nude form, and to show human beauty in three different aspects, a beautiful young woman, a vigorous young man, and a superb older man. This fine marble group recalls *Boreas Abducting Orythia*, in the Tuileries gardens (by *Gaspard Marsy and Anselme Flamen*); it possesses the same casual elegance, the same ingenious ease in its organisation. On the plinth, a bas-relief explains whatever is doubtful or unintelligible regarding its subject.

The monumental *Fountain of Neptune*, designed by Bandinelli and executed by Bartolommeo Ammannati, which was raised at the corner of the Palazzo della Signoria in the space left vacant by the razing of the Uberti's property, has a rich and grandiose appearance, although it is an inferior work to those of the other artists, redounding to the benefit of that favourite architect of Grand Duke Cosimo I. The marine god, of colossal size, stands on a conch drawn by four sea-horses, two in white marble, two veined; three tritons disport themselves at his feet, and the water falls in numerous jets into an octagonal basin four angles of which are

decorated with bronze statues representing Thetis, Doris, various sea gods, children playing with shells, corals, polyps, and other marine features; eight satyrs also of bronze, masks, and cornucopias complete the abundant ornamentation, in which that sumptuous mythological taste exhibited in the fountains of the park at Versailles, that one believes to be French but which merely displays Italian decadence, is already present.

The equestrian statue of Cosimo de Medici, the finest of the four that Giambologna had the rare happiness of creating in his life as an artist, displays great ease and nobility. The horse is posed well in a light trot; the man sits well in the saddle; he is not too historically anomalous, wears a costume half-real, half the Grand Duke's fancy, and produces a strong monumental effect. This statue is in bronze and presented a fair degree of difficulty in its casting; bas-reliefs relevant to Cosimo's life adorn the four faces of the pedestal. There is also a portrait of a dwarf, a court jester beloved of the duke.

Also worth noting, in this richly adorned square, are the Palazzo Uguccioni, the design of which is attributed to Raphael, because of its suave and pure style, which is indeed that of the master; and the roof attributed to the Pisans, the historic framework of which the Florentines had their Pisan prisoners execute as a sign of Pisan subjection and Florentine contempt, and which tops the post office, to the counters of which throng, beneath their straw hats, a large crowd of visitors seeking their letters, filed in alphabetical order according to the recipient's name. Also, in a corner of the square is located the coach station, with its perpetual arrival and departure of carriages.

But enough of this describing of statues and palazzos; let us take a carriage and go to the Cascine, the Champs-Élysées of Florence, to view human beings, and rest from the viewing of marble, stone and bronze.

## **Part XXXI: Foreigners and Florentines**

The Florentine type is essentially different to the Lombard and Venetian types. There are no longer those pure and regular lines, that broadish oval face, those wide shoulders, that happy serenity of form, and that healthy display of beauty, which strikes you on the streets of Milan, where, as Balzac said so aptly, the daughter of a porter looks like a princess. In Florence they would not understand the superb pagan epitaph of some count, whose name I forget, whose tomb bore the sole inscription: *Fu bello e Milanese (he was handsome, he was Milanese)*; the grace, voluptuousness, and spirited cheerfulness of Venice are absent from Florence.

In Florence, the figures lack the antique character which still remains in the rest of Italy, despite the many centuries gone by, the successive invasions, and so radical an alteration to manners and religion; they are visibly more modern; while there can be no mistaking a Neapolitan, or a purebred Roman, on the Boulevard de Gand (*Boulevard des Italiens*), Florentines would pass unnoticed among our Parisians; the fierce southern stamp by which other Italians are recognised would not betray them. There is no longer a sign of caprice, or inattention, in the features of the men and women of Florence; thoughtfulness, and moral

concern leave appreciable furrows on the brow, and add irregularity to the planes of the face, which thereby gains in expressiveness.

These Russian great ladies display, in their elegance, something of the sumptuous and barbaric, and in their pose, an imperious calm, a serene nonchalance, which they acquire from their reigning over serfs, and grants them an appearance of their own, easily recognisable under the English or French veneer with which they seek to conceal themselves. This particular one would have possessed the look of a Greek Panagia if, instead of the green trees of the Cascine, against which her immobile head was posed, one might have set there the gilded, embossed panels of a triptych. Her long slim fingers, burdened with enormous rings, gleamed, ungloved, on the carriage rim, as though a relic studded with precious stones were being extended for the faithful to kiss. In the corner of the car sat, pitifully hunched, a friend or lady's companion of neutral figure and dress, a shade resigned to her part in this glittering picture. In the past, blonde Venetian ladies were followed about by an African. It was a livelier arrangement, and produced a better effect, from the point of view of colour.



*Florence - Promenade of the Cascine*

In an English carriage, drawn by English horses, harnessed with English harness, sat an Englishwoman, surrounded by that English atmosphere brought from Hyde-Park by a process that we cannot claim to understand; the Cascine vanished before our eyes, our bluish view of the Apennines faded in a sudden mist, and the Serpentine replaced the Arno.

Instantly, a tempest whirled us from Florence to London, and we felt, dressed only in our thin clothing, a bitter blast of northern wind. I searched, mechanically, on the cushions of our car, for my absent overcoat, and yet this woman was as beautiful as a prosperous Englishwoman is beautiful. Never did a whiter swan preen her snowy down on Virginia Water, in some magical keepsake engraving; she was one of those ideal, vaporous, graceful creatures, as tall and slender as the subject of a Thomas Lawrence portrait, or a design by Richard Westall; a thin and flexible neck, golden hair in languid spirals, weeping like willow branches around a face kneaded from cold-cream and rose petals; eyelashes gleaming like silken threads above vaguely azure pupils. Gazing, at this transparent shade (who was perhaps in the process of digesting a large rump steak sprinkled with cayenne pepper, and drizzled with sherry) I could not help but think of Cymbeline, Perdita, Cordelia, Miranda; indeed, of all Shakespeare's poetic heroines. Two adorable infants, a proud and dreamy-eyed little boy like the portrait of young Lambton (*see Lawrence's painting, known as 'The Red Boy', of Charles William Lambton*), and a little girl who had escaped without doubt from the frame of some Joshua Reynolds painting, in which Lady Londonderry's children are represented with artificial wings in the manner of cherubs against a backcloth of blue sky (*compare Reynolds' 'Angels' Heads' depicting five views of the five-year old Frances Gordon*), occupied the front of the carriage, toying, gravely, with the ears of a King Charles spaniel as purebred as the ones that Anthony Van Dyck painted in his portrait of Henrietta of England (*compare Van Dyck's 'Three Eldest Children of Charles I'*).

A horseman, as stiff as a post, irreproachably clad, gentleman and dandy both, mounted on a plum-coloured blood bay gleaming like satin, the reins gathered in his hand, the pommel of his crop between his lips, hovered near the carriage, in the most bored and splenetic manner in the world; he seemed to be ruminating on some madrigal which failed to emerge, and which the young woman awaited with an indulgently distracted air.

Not far away, a Sicilian prince was in conversation with another Englishwoman of a completely different type, almost Italianised and gilded by the warm sun of Florence; she possessed a fine and intelligent face, a lovely smooth brow beneath black hair, and a slim waist fit for a lady's dress or an Amazon's tunic; she was a kind of delicate Clorinda (*see Tasso's 'Gerusalemme Liberata'*), an angel, wavering between a young girl and an ephebe, of the species that the sculptress Félicie de Fauveau likes to pose above some font from the Middle Ages.

A queenly hand, on a magnificent arm that sculpture has made famous, allowed us to recognise, in the depths of her carriage, one of our old Parisian friends who retains, in Florence, despite her long exile, all the spirit and all the grace that made her Wednesdays in the Rue du Mont-Blanc (*Rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin*) so sought after; we went to greet her, happy to find a friendly face among those beautiful strangers, and many a question fluttered madly on our lips, she speaking of Paris, we of Florence.

Regarding Florence, I realize that, in this gallery of portraits, I have neglected the Florentine ladies. There are, in fact, very few in Florence, and their appearance, of which I have tried to sketch the general idea, lacks that kind of theatrical beauty which one can admire from afar; I shall note, only, that they dressed then in very tight long low-waisted corsets of a specific form

very close to that of the old French style, which imprinted on their movements a certain stiff awkwardness, conflicting with the Italian customary lack of constraint. Some had their hair parted at one side like the men; is it a local fashion, or the need to hide strands abraded by the comb? That I could not discover. This disturbing oddity troubles one, without at first noting the reason, and greatly alters their appearance; however, one becomes accustomed to it, and in the end finds it adds a certain grace.

To repair this omission to my gallery, let me sketch the beautiful head of Signora \*\*\*, a Florentine blue-blood, who was pointed out to us, at the centre of the Cascine circle, surrounded by a court of worshippers. Her large, calm eyes, her well-nigh fixed gaze, her strong pure features, her well-defined mouth, and the correct and powerful line of her neck, recalled Lucrezia del Fede so loved by André del Sarto (*whose wife she became*), and those striking Bronzino portraits (*compare Bronzino's 'Portrait of a Lady', that of Lucrezia Panciatichi, in the Uffizi*), which once seen are never forgotten, and which reflect the Florentine type in its noblest aspect. Why must those great artists lie asleep there in the grave! They might have left one more immortal image to the world.

We were etching this pure image on our memory when we saw every head turn to the same side. This unusual movement was produced by the entrance of the young Count \*\*\*, who appeared from the main alley, driving his phaeton himself, with grace and incomparable precision, which was drawn by two wonderful and elegant little black horses, of extraordinary agility and docility; this charming team made a round of the sand of the Cascine circle that a compass could not have imitated with more exactitude; the Count, throwing the reins to his groom, leapt, lightly, to the ground and went to pay his dues to the beautiful Florentine, the figure of whom I have just sketched.

He was a young Hungarian, of twenty-two or twenty-three years old, of an Apollonian beauty, so flexible, so clear, so slender, so virile in his feminine grace, that the most robust of onlookers would have lowered their weapons before him. Moreover, he was the lion of Florence – lacking any hint of the poorly-executed engraving so named (*of Donatello's sculpture, known as the Mazocco*)! He was dressed in the most wondrous national costume: a braided dolman, a jacket stiff with gold embroidery, leather boots strewn with pearls, and a hat studded with diamonds and topped by egret plumes; a costume that he wore with charming complacency at intimate evening gatherings to satisfy female curiosity, and doubtless also out of coquetry; a coquetry rightly allowed, since the Hungarian costume, despite its profusion of ornaments, is one of heroic and martial elegance, dispelling any ridiculous notion of it exemplifying mere dandyism.

Defeated, the women admitted, with pleasure, that they seemed ugly next to the handsome Hungarian, and that their richest ball gowns were only rags compared to his splendid garments glittering with gold and precious stones.

A mysterious appearance, at that time, much intrigued the cosmopolitan curiosity of those in Florence: a woman, unaccompanied, and of the noblest looks, appeared at the Cascine, reclining in the depths of a brown carriage, and draped with a large white crepe-de-chine shawl the fringes of which reached almost to her feet. Her Parisian hat, in the signature style of Madame Royer, gave a fresh halo to her fine and pure profile, carved like that in some antique

cameo, and contrasting, in its Grecian form, with her outfit's modern elegance and almost English look of calm distinction. Her neck, bluish being so white, the smooth pinkness of her cheeks, and her light blue eyes, seemed to denote a northern beauty; but the gleam in those pale sapphire eyes was so vivid that it must surely have been sparked beneath some southern sky; her hair, raised by a crepe headband, possessed the gilded tones and lively quality which characterises blondes native to hot countries; one of her arms was buried in the folds of her shawl like Mnemosyne (*the goddess of Memory*), the other, circled by a bracelet to trenchant effect, emerged half-bared from the flow of lace about her sabot sleeve as she toyed at a dark-purple camellia, with the tip of her small gloved hand; the distracted gesture of an habitual dreamer. Was she English, Italian or French? This was what none could say, because none knew her. She toured the Cascine, stopped for a moment on the circle, seemingly neither occupied with nor surprised by a spectacle which appeared to be new to her, and took the road back to the city.

Next day, we waited for her in vain; she failed to reappear. What was the secret behind that single visit? Had the unknown woman arrived there, from the ends of Europe, for a mysterious meeting? Had she wanted to confirm the presence of her rival accompanied by her unfaithful lover? I was never able to ascertain. But I have not yet forgotten that fleeting vision, which appeared to me, in Florence.

### **The End of Gautier's Travels in Italy**