

The Bravo

The Bravo

by

James Fenimore Cooper

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CONTENTS

PREFACE	1
CHAPTER I	3
CHAPTER II	13
CHAPTER III	25
CHAPTER IV	35
CHAPTER V	42
CHAPTER VI	53
CHAPTER VII	65
CHAPTER VIII	75
CHAPTER IX	87
CHAPTER X	97
CHAPTER XI	105
CHAPTER XII	114
CHAPTER XIII	125
CHAPTER XIV	136
CHAPTER XV	147
CHAPTER XVI	158
CHAPTER XVII	172
CHAPTER XVIII	186
CHAPTER XIX	195
CHAPTER XX	205
CHAPTER XXI	215
CHAPTER XXII	222

CHAPTER XXIII	233
CHAPTER XXIV	244
CHAPTER XXV	255
CHAPTER XXVI	264
CHAPTER XXVII	273
CHAPTER XXVIII	282
CHAPTER XXIX	294
CHAPTER XXX	303
CHAPTER XXXI	314

PREFACE

IT is to be regretted the world does not discriminate more justly in its use of political terms. Governments are usually called either monarchies or republics. The former class embraces equally those institutions in which the sovereign is worshipped as a god, and those in which he performs the humble office of a manikin. In the latter we find aristocracies and democracies blended in the same generic appellation. The consequence of a generalization so wide is an utter confusion on the subject of the polity of states.

The author has endeavored to give his countrymen, in this book, a picture of the social system of one of the *soi-disant* republics of the other hemisphere. There has been no attempt to portray historical characters, only too fictitious in their graver dress, but simply to set forth the familiar operations of Venetian policy. For the justification of his likeness, after allowing for the defects of execution, he refers to the well-known work of M. Daru.

A history of the progress of political liberty, written purely in the interests of humanity, is still a desideratum in literature. In nations which have made a false commencement, it would be found that the citizen, or rather the subject, has extorted immunity after immunity, as his growing intelligence and importance have both instructed and required him to defend those particular rights which were necessary to his well-being. A certain accumulation of these immunities constitutes, with a solitary and recent exception in Switzerland, the essence of European liberty, even at this hour. It is scarcely necessary to tell the reader that this freedom, be it more or less, depends on a principle entirely different from our own. Here the immunities do not proceed from, but they are granted to, the government, being, in other words, concessions of natural rights made by the people to the state, for the benefits of social protection. So long as this vital difference exists between ourselves and other nations, it will be vain to think of finding analogies in their institutions. It is true that, in an age like this, public opinion is itself a charter, and that the most despotic government which exists within the pale of Christendom must, in some degree, respect its influence. The mildest and justest governments in Europe are, at this moment; theoretically despotisms. The characters of both prince and people enter largely into the consideration of so extraordinary results; and it should never be forgotten that, though the character of the latter be sufficiently secure, that of the former is liable to change. But, admitting every benefit which possibly can flow from a just administration, with wise and humane princes, a government which is not properly based on the people possesses an unavoidable and oppressive evil of the first

magnitude, in the necessity of supporting itself by physical force and onerous impositions, against the natural action of the majority.

Were we to characterize a republic, we should say it was a state in which power, both theoretically and practically, is derived from the nation, with a constant responsibility of the agents of the public to the people—a responsibility that is neither to be evaded nor denied. That such a system is better on a large than on a small scale, though contrary to brilliant theories which have been written to uphold different institutions, must be evident on the smallest reflection, since the danger of all popular governments is from popular mistakes; and a people of diversified interests and extended territorial possessions, are much less likely to be the subjects of sinister passions than the inhabitants of a single town or county, If to this definition we should add, as an infallible test of the genus, that a true republic is a government of which all others are jealous and vituperative, on the instinct of self-preservation, we believe there would be no mistaking the class. How far Venice would have been obnoxious to this proof, the reader is left to judge for himself.

CHAPTER I

"I stood in Venice on the Bridge of Sighs,
A palace and a prison on each hand;
I saw from out the wave her structures rise,
As from the stroke of the enchanter's wand;
A thousand years their cloudy wings expand
Around me, and a dying glory smiles
O'er the far times, when many a subject land
Looked to the winged lions' marble piles,
Where Venice sat in state, throned on her hundred isles."
—BYRON.

THE sun had disappeared behind the summits of the Tyrolean Alps, and the moon was already risen above the low barrier of the Lido. Hundreds of pedestrians were pouring out of the narrow streets of Venice into the square of St. Mark, like water gushing through some strait aqueduct into a broad and bubbling basin. Gallant cavalieri and grave cittadini; soldiers of Dalmatia, and seamen of the galleys; dames of the city, and females of lighter manners; jewellers of the Rialto, and traders from the Levant; Jew, Turk, and Christian; traveller, adventurer, podestà, valet, avvocato, and gondolier, held their way alike to the common centre of amusement. The hurried air and careless eye; the measured step and jealous glance; the jest and laugh; the song of the cantatrice, and the melody of the flute; the grimace of the buffoon, and the tragic frown of the improvisatore; the pyramid of the grotesque, the compelled and melancholy smile of the harpist, cries of water-sellers, cowls of monks, plumage of warriors, hum of voices, and the universal movement and bustle, added to the more permanent objects of the place, rendered the scene the most remarkable of Christendom.

On the very confines of that line which separates western from eastern Europe, and in constant communication with the latter, Venice possessed a greater admixture of character and costume, than any other of the numerous ports of that region. A portion of this peculiarity is still to be observed, under the fallen fortunes of the place; but at the period of our tale, the city of the isles, though no longer mistress of the Mediterranean, nor even of the Adriatic, was still rich and powerful. Her influence was felt in the councils of the civilized world, and her commerce, though waning, was yet sufficient to uphold the vast possessions of those families, whose ancestors had become rich in the day of her prosperity. Men lived among her islands in that state of incipient lethargy, which marks the progress of a downward course, whether the decline be of a moral or of a physical decay.

At the hour we have named, the vast parallelogram of the Piazza was filling fast, the cafés and casinos within the porticoes, which surround three of its sides, being already thronged with company. While all beneath the arches was gay and brilliant with the flare of torch and lamp, the noble range of edifices called the Procuratories, the massive pile of the Ducal Palace, the most ancient Christian church, the granite columns of the Piazzetta, the triumphal masts of the great square, and the giddy tower of the Campanile, were slumbering in the more mellow glow of the moon.

Facing the wide area of the great square stood the quaint and venerable cathedral of San Marco. A temple of trophies, and one equal[^] proclaiming the prowess and the piety of its founders, this remarkable structure presided over the other fixtures of the place, like a monument of the Republic's antiquity and greatness. Its Saracenic architecture, the rows of precious but useless little columns that load its front, the low Asiatic domes which rest upon its walls in the repose of a thousand years, the rude and gaudy mosaics, and above all the captured horses of Corinth which start from out the sombre mass in the glory of Grecian art, received from the solemn and appropriate light a character of melancholy and mystery, that well comported with the thick recollections which crowd the mind as the eye gazes at this rare relic of the past.

As fit companions to this edifice, the other peculiar ornaments of the place stood at hand. The base of the Campanile lay in shadow, but a hundred feet of its gray summit received the full rays of the moon along its eastern face. The masts destined to bear the conquered ensigns of Candia, Constantinople, and the Morea, cut the air by its side, in dark and fairy lines; while at the extremity of the smaller square, and near the margin of the sea, the forms of the winged lion and the patron saint of the city, each on his column of African granite, were distinctly traced against the background of the azure sky.

It was near the base of the former of these massive blocks of stone, that one stood who seemed to gaze at the animated and striking scene with the listlessness and indifference of satiety. A multitude, some in masks and others careless of being known, had poured along the quay into the Piazzetta, on their way to the principal square, while this individual had scarce turned a glance aside, or changed a limb in weariness. His attitude was that of patient, practised, and obedient waiting on another's pleasure. With folded arms, a body poised on one leg, and a vacant though good-humored eye, he appeared to attend some beck of authority ere he quitted the spot. A silken jacket, in whose tissue flowers of the gayest colors were interwoven, the falling collar of scarlet, the bright velvet cap with armorial bearings embroidered on its front, proclaimed him to be a gondolier in private service.

Wearied at length with the antics of a distant group of tumblers, whose pile of human bodies had for a time arrested his look, this individual turned away, and faced the light air from the water. Recognition and pleasure shot into his

countenance, and in a moment his arms were interlocked with those of a swarthy mariner, who wore the loose attire and Phrygian cap of men of his calling. The gondolier was the first to speak, the words flowing from him in the soft accents of his native islands.

"Is it thou, Stefano? They said thou hadst fallen into the gripe of the devils of Barbary, and that thou wast planting flowers for an infidel with thy hands, and watering them with thy tears!"

The answer was in the harsher dialect of Calabria, and it was given with the rough familiarity of a seaman.

"La Bella Sorrentina is no housekeeper of a curato! She is not a damsel to take a siesta with a Tunisian rover prowling about in her neighborhood. Hadst ever been beyond the Lido, thou wouldst have known the difference between chasing the felucca and catching her."

"Kneel down and thank San Teodoro for his care. There was much praying on thy decks that hour, caro Stefano, though none is bolder among the mountains of Calabria when thy felucca is once safely drawn up on the beach!"

The mariner cast a half-comic, half-serious glance upward at the image of the patron saint, ere he replied.

"There was more need of the wings of thy lion than of the favor of thy saint. I never come farther north for aid than San Gennaro, even when it blows a hurricane."

"So much the worse for thee, caro, since the good bishop is better at stopping the lava than at quieting the wind. But there was danger, then, of losing the felucca and her brave people among the Turks?"

"There was, in truth, a Tunis-man prowling about between Stromboli and Sicily; but, Ali di San Michele! he might better have chased the cloud above the volcano than run after the felucca in a sirocco!"

"Thou wast chicken-hearted, Stefano!"

"I!—I was more like thy lion here, with some small additions of chains and muzzles."

"As was seen by thy felucca's speed?"

"Cospetto! I wished myself a knight of San Giovanni a thousand times during the chase, and La Bella Sorrentina a brave Maltese galley, if it were only for the cause of Christian honor! The miscreant hung upon my quarter for the better part of three glasses; so near that I could tell which of the knaves wore dirty cloth in his turban, and which clean. It was a sore sight to a Christian, Stefano, to see the right thus borne upon by an infidel."

"And thy feet warmed with the thought of the bastinado, caro mio?"

"I have run too often barefoot over our Calabrian mountains, to tingle at the sole with every fancy of that sort."

"Every man has his weak spot, and I know thine to be dread of a Turk's arm. Thy native hills have their soft as well as their hard ground, but it is said the Tunisian chooses a board knotty as his own heart, when he amuses himself with the wailings of a Christian."

"Well, the happiest of us all must take such as fortune brings. If my soles are to be shod with blows, the honest priest of Sant' Agata will be cheated by a penitent. I have bargained with the good curato, that all such accidental calamities shall go in the general account of penance. But how fares the world of Venice?—and what dost thou among the canals at this season, to keep the flowers of thy jacket from wilting?"

"To-day, as yesterday, and to-morrow will be as to-day. I row the gondola from the Rialto to the Giudecca; from San Giorgio to San Marco; from San Marco to the Lido, and from the Lido home. There are no Tunis-men by the way, to chill the heart or warm the feet."

"Enough of friendship. And is there nothing stirring in the Republic?—no young noble drowned, nor any Jew hanged?"

"Nothing of that much interest—except the calamity which befell Pietro. Thou rememberest Pietrello? he who crossed into Dalmatia with thee once, as a supernumerary, the time he was suspected of having aided the young Frenchman in running away with a senator's daughter?"

"Do I remember the last famine? The rogue did nothing but eat maccheroni, and swallow the lachryma christi, which the Dalmatian count had on freight."

"Poverino! His gondola has been run down by an Ancona-man, who passed over the boat as if it were a senator stepping on a fly."

"So much for little fish coming into deep water."

"The honest fellow was crossing the Giudecca, with a stranger, who had occasion to say his prayers at the Redentore, when the brig hit him in the canopy, and broke up the gondola, as if it had been a bubble left by the Bucentaur."

"The padrone should have been too generous to complain of Pietro's clumsiness, since it met with its own punishment."

"Madre di Dio! He went to sea that hour, or he might be feeding the fishes of the Lagoon! There is not a gondolier in Venice who did not feel the wrong at his heart; and we know how to obtain justice for an insult, as well as our masters."

"Well, a gondola is mortal, as well as a felucca, and both have their time; better die by the prow of a brig than fall into the gripe of a Turk. How is thy young master, Gino; and is he likely to obtain his claims of the Senate?"

"He cools himself in the Giudecca in the morning; and if thou wouldst know what he does at evening, thou hast only to look among the nobles in the Broglio."

As the gondolier spoke he glanced an eye aside at a group of patrician rank, who paced the gloomy arcades which supported the superior walls of the Doge's palace, a spot sacred, at times, to the uses of the privileged.

"I am no stranger to the habit thy Venetian nobles have of coming to that low colonnade at this hour, but I never before heard of their preferring the waters of the Giudecca for their baths."

"Were even the Doge to throw himself out of a gondola, he must sink or swim, like a meaner Christian."

"Acqua dell' Adriatico! Was the young duca going to the Redentore, too, to say his prayers?"

"He was coming back after having—but what matters it in what canal a young noble sighs away the night! We happened to be near when the Ancona-man performed his feat; while Giorgio and I were boiling with rage at the awkwardness of the stranger, my master, who never had much taste or knowledge in gondolas, went into the water to save the young lady from sharing the fate of her uncle."

"Diavolo! This is the first syllable thou hast uttered concerning any young lady, or of the death of her uncle!"

"Thou wert thinking of thy Tunis-man, and hast forgotten. I must have told thee how near the beautiful Signora was to sharing the fate of the gondola, and how the loss of the Roman marchese weighs, in addition, on the soul of the padrone."

"Santo Padre! That a Christian should die the death of a hunted dog by the carelessness of a gondolier!"

"It may have been lucky for the Ancona-man that it so fell out; for they say the Roman was one of influence enough to make a senator cross the Bridge of Sighs, at need."

"The devil take all careless watermen, say I! And what became of the awkward rogue!"

"I tell thee he went outside the Lido that very hour, or—"

"Pietrello?"

"He was brought up by the oar of Giorgio, for both of us were active in saving the cushions and other valuables."

"Couldst thou do nothing for the poor Roman? Ill-luck may follow that brig on account of his death!"

"Ill-luck follow her, say I, till she lays her bones on some rock that is harder than the heart of her padrone. As for the stranger, we could do no more than offer up a prayer to San Teodoro, since he never rose after the blow. But what has brought thee to Venice, caro mio? for thy ill-fortune with the oranges, in the last voyage, caused thee to denounce the place."

The Calabrian laid a finger on one cheek, and drew the skin down in a manner to give a droll expression to his dark, comic eye, while the whole of his really fine Grecian face was charged with an expression of coarse humor.

"Look you, Gino—thy master sometimes calls for his gondola between sunset and morning?"

"An owl is not more wakeful than he has been of late. This head of mine has not been on a pillow before the sun has come above the Lido, since the snows melted from Monselice."

"And when the sun of thy master's countenance sets in his own palazzo, thou hastenest off to the bridge of the Rial to, among the jewellers and butchers, to proclaim the manner in which he passed the night?"

"Diamine! 'Twould be the last night I served the Duca di Sant' Agata, were my tongue so limber! The gondolier and the confessor are the two privy-councillors of a noble, Master Stefano, with this small difference—that the last only knows what the sinner wishes to reveal, while the first sometimes knows more. I can find a safer, if not a more honest employment, than to be running about with my master's secrets in the air."

"And I am wiser than to let every Jew broker in San Marco, here, have a peep into my charter-party."

"Nay, old acquaintance, there is some difference between our occupations, after all. A padrone of a felucca cannot, in justice, be compared to the most confidential gondolier of a Neapolitan duke, who has an unsettled right to be admitted to the Council of Three Hundred."

"Just the difference between smooth water and rough—you ruffle the surface of a canal with a lazy oar, while I run the channel of Piombino in a mistral, shoot the Faro of Messina in a white squall, double Santa Maria di Leuca in a breathing Levanter, and come skimming up the Adriatic before a sirocco that is hot enough to cook my maccaroni, and which sets the whole sea boiling worse than the caldrons of Scylla."

"Hist!" eagerly interrupted the gondolier, who had indulged, with Italian humor, in the controversy for pre-eminence, though without any real feeling, "here comes

one who may think, else, we shall have need of his hand to settle the dispute—
Eccolo!"

The Calabrian recoiled a pace in silence, and stood regarding the individual who had caused this hurried remark, with a gloomy but steady air. The stranger moved slowly past. His years were under thirty, though the calm gravity of his countenance imparted to it a character of more mature age. The cheeks were bloodless, but they betrayed rather the pallid hue of mental than of bodily disease. The perfect condition of the physical man was sufficiently exhibited in the muscular fulness of a body which, though light and active, gave every indication of strength. His step was firm, assured, and even; his carriage erect and easy, and his whole mien was strongly characterized by a self-possession that could scarcely escape observation; and yet his attire was that of an inferior class. A doublet of common velvet, a dark Montero cap, such as was then much used in the southern countries of Europe, with other vestments of a similar fashion, composed his dress. The face was melancholy rather than sombre, and its perfect repose accorded well with the striking calmness of the body. The lineaments of the former, however, were bold and even noble, exhibiting that strong and manly outline which is so characteristic of the finer class of the Italian countenance. Out of this striking array of features gleamed an eye that was full of brilliancy, meaning, and passion.

As the stranger passed, his glittering organs rolled over the persons of the gondolier and his companion, but the look, though searching, was entirely without interest. 'Twas the wandering but wary glance, which men who have much reason to distrust, habitually cast on a multitude. It turned with the same jealous keenness on the face of the next it encountered, and by the time the steady and well-balanced form was lost in the crowd, that quick and glowing eye had gleamed, in the same rapid and uneasy manner, on twenty others.

Neither the gondolier nor the mariner of Calabria spoke until their riveted gaze after the retiring figure became useless. Then the former simply ejaculated, with a strong respiration,—

"Jacopo!"

His companion raised three of his fingers, with an occult meaning, towards the palace of the Doges.

"Do they let him take the air, even in San Marco?" he asked, in unfeigned surprise.

"It is not easy, caro amico, to make water run up stream or to stop the downward current. It is said that most of the senators would sooner lose their hopes of the horned bonnet, than lose him. Jacopo! He knows more family secrets than the good Priore of San Marco himself, and he, poor man, is half his time in the confessional."

"Ay, they are afraid to put him in an iron jacket, lest awkward secrets should be squeezed out."

"Corpo di Bacco! there would be little peace in Venice, if the Council of Three should take it into their heads to loosen the tongue of yonder man in that rude manner."

"But they say, Gino, that thy Council of Three has a fashion of feeding the fishes of the Lagunes, which might throw the suspicion of his death on some unhappy Ancona-man, were the body ever to come up again."

"Well, no need of bawling it aloud, as if thou wert hailing a Sicilian through thy trumpet, though the fact should be so. To say the truth, there are few men in business who are thought to have more custom than he who has just gone up the Piazzetta."

"Two sequins!" rejoined the Calabrian, enforcing his meaning by a significant grimace.

"Santa Madonna! Thou forgettest, Stefano, that not even the confessor has any trouble with a job in which he has been employed. Not a caratano less than a hundred will buy a stroke of his art. Your blows for two sequins, leave a man leisure to tell tales, or even to say his prayers half the time."

"Jacopo!" ejaculated the other, with an emphasis which seemed to be a sort of summing up of all his aversion and horror.

The gondolier shrugged his shoulders with quite as much meaning as a man born on the shores of the Baltic could have conveyed by words; but he too appeared to think the matter exhausted.

"Stefano Milano," he added, after a moment of pause, "there are things in Venice which he who would eat his macaroni in peace, would do well to forget. Let thy errand in port be what it may, thou art in good season to witness the regatta which will be given by the state itself to-morrow."

"Hast thou an oar for that race?"

"Giorgio's, or mine, under the patronage of San Teodoro. The prize will be a silver gondola to him who is lucky or skilful enough to win; and then we shall have the nuptials with the Adriatic."

"Thy nobles had best woo the bride well; for there are heretics who lay claim to her good-will. I met a rover of strange rig and miraculous fleetness, in rounding the headlands of Otranto, who seemed to have half a mind to follow the felucca in her path towards the Lagunes."

"Did the sight warm thee at the soles of thy feet, Gino dear?"

"There was not a turbaned head on his deck, but every sea-cap sat upon a well-covered poll and a shorn chin. Thy Bucentaur is no longer the bravest craft that floats between Dalmatia and the islands, though her gilding may glitter brightest. There are men beyond the pillars of Hercules who are not satisfied with doing all

that can be done on their own coasts, but who are pretending to do much of that which can be done on ours."

"The Republic is a little aged, caro, and years need rest. The joints of the Bucentaur are racked by time and many voyages to the Lido. I have heard my master say that the leap of the winged lion is not as far as it was, even in his young days."

"Don Camillo has the reputation of talking boldly of the foundation of this city of piles, when he has the roof of old Sant' Agata safely over his head. Were he to speak more reverently of the homed bonnet, and of the Council of Three, his pretensions to succeed to the rights of his forefathers might seem juster in the eyes of his judges. But distance is a great mellower of colors and softener of fears. My own opinion of the speed of the felucca, and of the merits of a Turk, undergo changes of this sort between port and the open sea; and I have known thee, good Gino, forget San Teodoro, and bawl as lustily to San Gennaro, when at Naples, as if thou really fancied thyself in danger from the mountain."

"One must speak to those at hand, in order to be quickest heard," rejoined the gondolier, casting a glance that was partly humorous, and not without superstition, upwards at the image which crowned the granite column against whose pedestal he still leaned. "A truth which warns us to be prudent, for yonder Jew cast a look this way, as if he felt a conscientious scruple in letting any irreverent remark of ours go without reporting. The bearded old rogue is said to have other dealings with the Three Hundred besides asking for the moneys he has lent to their sons. And so, Stefano, thou thinkest the Republic will never plant another mast of triumph in San Marco, or bring more trophies to the venerable church?"

"Napoli herself, with her constant change of masters, is as likely to do a great act on the sea as thy winged beast just now! Thou art well enough to row a gondola in the canals, Gino, or to follow thy master to his Calabrian castle; but if thou wouldst know what passes in the wide world, thou must be content to listen to mariners of the long course. The day of San Marco has gone by, and that of the heretics more north has come."

"Thou hast been much of late among the lying Genoese, Stefano, that thou comest hither with these idle tales of what a heretic can do. Genova la Superba! What has a city of walls to compare with one of canals and islands like this?—and what has that Apennine republic performed, to be put in comparison with the great deeds of the Queen of the Adriatic? Thou forgettest that Venezia has been—"

"Zitto, zitto! that *has* been, caro mio, is a great word with all Italy. Thou art as proud of the past as a Roman of the Trastevere."

"And the Roman of the Trastevere is right. Is it nothing, Stefano Milano, to be descended from a great and victorious people?"

"It is better, Gino Monaldi, to be one of a people which is great and victorious just now. The enjoyment of the past is like the pleasure of the fool who dreams of the wine he drank yesterday."

"This is well for a Neapolitan, whose country never was a nation," returned the gondolier angrily. "I have heard Don Camillo, who is one educated as well as born in the land, often say that half of the people of Europe have ridden the horse of Sicily, and used the legs of thy Napoli, except those who had the best right to the services of both."

"Even so; and yet the figs are as sweet as ever, and the beccafichi as tender! The ashes of the volcano cover all!"

"Gino!" said a voice of authority, near the gondolier.

"Signore."

He who interrupted the dialogue pointed to the boat without saying more.

"A rivederti," hastily muttered the gondolier. His friend squeezed his hand in perfect amity—for in truth, they were countrymen by birth, though chance had trained the former on the canals—and, at the next instant, Gino was arranging the cushions for his master, having first aroused his subordinate brother of the oar from a profound sleep.

CHAPTER II

"Hast ever swam in a gondola at Venice?"

—SHAKESPEARE.

WHEN Don Camillo Monforte entered the gondola he did not take his seat in the pavilion. With an arm leaning on the top of the canopy, and his cloak thrown loosely over one shoulder, the young noble stood, in a musing attitude, until his dexterous servitors had extricated the boat from the little fleet which crowded the quay, and had urged it into open water. This duty performed, Gino touched his scarlet cap, and looked at his master as if to inquire the direction in which they were to proceed. He was answered by a silent gesture that indicated the route of the great canal.

"Thou hast an ambition, Gino, to show thy skill in the regatta?" Don Camillo observed, when they had made a little progress. "The motive merits success. Thou wast speaking to a stranger when I summoned thee to the gondola?"

"I was asking the news of our Calabrian hills from one who has come into port with his felucca, though the man took the name of San Gennaro to witness that his former luckless voyage should be the last."

"How does he call his felucca, and what is the name of the padrone?"

"La Bella Sorrentina, commanded by a certain Stefano Milano, son of an ancient servant of Sant' Agata. The bark is none of the worst for speed, and it has some reputation for beauty. It ought to be of happy fortune, too, for the good curato recommended it, with many a devout prayer, to the Virgin and to San Francesco."

The noble appeared to lend more attention to the discourse, which, until now, on his part, had been commenced in the listless manner with which a superior encourages an indulged dependent.

"La Bella Sorrentina! Have I not reason to know the bark?"

"Nothing more true, Signore. Her padrone has relations at Sant' Agata, as I have told your eccellenza, and his vessel has lain on the beach near the castle many a bleak winter."

"What brings him to Venice?"

"That is what I would give my newest jacket of your eccellenza's colors to know, Signore. I have as little wish to inquire into other people's affairs as any one, and I very well know that discretion is the chief virtue of a gondolier. I ventured,

however, a deadly hint concerning his errand, such as ancient neighborhood would warrant, but he was as cautious of his answers as if he were freighted with the confessions of fifty Christians. Now, if your eccellenza should see fit to give me authority to question him in your name, the deuce is in 't if, between respect for his lord, and good management, we could not draw something more than a false bill of lading from him."

"Thou wilt take thy choice of my gondolas for the regatta, Gino," observed the Duke of Sant' Agata, entering the pavilion, and throwing himself on the glossy black leathern cushions, without adverting to the suggestion of his servant.

The gondola continued its noiseless course, with the sprite-like movement peculiar to that description of boat. Gino, who, as superior over his fellow, stood perched on the little arched deck in the stern, pushed his oar with accustomed readiness and skill, now causing the light vessel to sheer to the right, and now to the left, as it glided among the multitude of craft, of all sizes and uses, which it met in its passage. Palace after palace had been passed, and more than one of the principal canals, which diverged towards the different spectacles, or the other places of resort frequented by his master, was left behind, without Don Camillo giving any new direction. At length the boat arrived opposite to a building which seemed to excite more than common expectation. Giorgio worked his oar with a single hand, looking over his shoulder at Gino, and Gino permitted his blade fairly to trail on the water. Both seemed to await new orders, manifesting something like that species of instinctive sympathy with him they served, which a long practised horse is apt to show when he draws near a gate that is seldom passed unvisited by his driver.

The edifice which caused this hesitation in the two gondoliers was one of those residences in Venice which are quite as remarkable for their external riches and ornaments as for their singular situation amid the waters. A massive rustic basement of marble was seated as solidly in the element as if it grew from a living rock, while story was seemingly raised on story, in the wanton observance of the most capricious rules of meretricious architecture, until the pile reached an altitude that is little known, except in the dwellings of princes. Colonnades, medallions, and massive cornices overhung the canal, as if the art of man had taken pride in loading the superstructure in a manner to mock the unstable element which concealed its base. A flight of steps, on which each gentle undulation produced by the passage of the barge washed a wave, conducted to a vast vestibule, that answered many of the purposes of a court. Two or three gondolas were moored near, but the absence of their people showed they were for the use of those who dwelt within. The boats were protected from rough collision with the passing craft by piles driven obliquely into the bottom. Similar spars, with painted and ornamented heads, that sometimes bore the colors and arms of the proprietor, formed a sort of little haven for the gondolas of the household, before the door of every dwelling of mark.

"Where is it the pleasure of your eccellenza to be rowed?" asked Gino, when he found his sympathetic delay had produced no order.

"To the palazzo."

Giorgio threw a glance of surprise back at his comrade, but the obedient gondola shot by the gloomy, though rich abode, as if the little bark had suddenly obeyed an inward impulse. In a moment more it whirled aside, and the hollow sound, caused by the splash of water between high walls, announced its entrance into a narrow canal. With shortened oars the men still urged the boat ahead, now turning short into some new channel, now glancing beneath a low bridge, and now uttering, in the sweet shrill tones of the country and their craft, the well-known warning to those who were darting in an opposite direction. A back-stroke of Gino's oar, however, soon brought the side of the arrested boat to a flight of steps.

"Thou wilt follow me," said Don Camillo, as he placed his foot, with the customary caution, on the moist stone, and laid a hand on the shoulder of Gino; "I have need of thee."

Neither the vestibule, nor the entrance, nor the other visible accessories of the dwelling were so indicative of luxury and wealth as that of the palace on the great canal. Still they were all such as denoted the residence of a noble of consideration.

"Thou wilt do wisely, Gino, to trust thy fortunes to the new gondola," said the master, as he mounted the heavy stone stairs to an upper floor, pointing, as he spoke, to a new and beautiful boat, which lay in a corner of the large vestibule, as carriages are seen standing in the courts of houses built on more solid ground. "He who would find favor with Jupiter must put his own shoulder to the wheel, thou knowest, my friend."

The eye of Gino brightened, and he was voluble in his expression of thanks. They had ascended to the first floor, and were already deep in a suite of gloomy apartments, before the gratitude and professional pride of the gondolier were exhausted.

"Aided by a powerful arm and a fleet gondola, thy chance will be as good as another's, Gino," said Don Camillo, closing the door of his cabinet on his servant; "at present thou mayest give some proof of zeal in my service, in another manner. Is the face of a man called Jacopo Frontoni known to thee?"

"Eccellenza!" exclaimed the gondolier, gasping for breath.

"I ask thee if thou knowest the countenance of one named Frontoni?"

"His countenance, Signore!"

"By what else wouldst thou distinguish a man?"

"A man, Signor Don Camillo!"

"Art thou mocking thy master, Gino? I have asked thee if thou art acquainted with the person of a certain Jacopo Frontoni, a dweller here in Venice?"

"Eccellenza, yes."

"He I mean has been long remarked by the misfortunes of his family; the father being now in exile on the Dalmatian coast, or elsewhere."

"Eccellenza, yes."

"There are many of the name of Frontoni, and it is important that thou shouldst not mistake the man. Jacopo, of that family, is a youth of some five-and-twenty, of an active frame and melancholy visage, and of less vivacity of temperament than is wont, at his years."

"Eccellenza, yes."

"One who consorts but little with his fellows, and who is rather noted for the silence and industry with which he attends to his concerns, than for any of the usual pleasantries and trifling of men of his cast. A certain Jacopo Frontoni, that hath his abode somewhere near the arsenal?"

"Cospetto! Signor Duca, the man is as well known to us gondoliers as the bridge of the Rialto! Your eccellenza has no need to trouble yourself to describe him."

Don Camillo Monforte was searching among the papers of a secrétaire. He raised his eyes in some little amazement at the sally of his dependent, and then he quietly resumed his occupation.

"If thou knowest the man, it is enough."

"Eccellenza, yes. And what is your pleasure with this accursed Jacopo?"

The Duke of Sant' Agata seemed to recollect himself. He replaced the papers which had been deranged, and he closed the secrétaire.

"Gino," he said, in a tone of confidence and amity, "thou wert born on my estates, though so long trained here to the oar in Venice, and thou hast passed thy life in my service."

"Eccellenza, yes."

"It is my desire that thou shouldst end thy days where they began. I have had much confidence in thy discretion hitherto, and I have satisfaction in saying it has never failed thee, notwithstanding thou hast necessarily been a witness of some exploits of youth which might have drawn embarrassment on thy master were thy tongue less disposed to silence."

"Eccellenza, yes."

Don Camillo smiled; but the gleam of humor gave way to a look of grave and anxious thought.

"As thou knowest the person of him I have named, our affair is simple. Take this packet," he continued, placing a sealed letter of more than usual size into the hand of the gondolier, and drawing from his finger a signet ring, "with this token of thy authority. Within that arch of the Doge's palace which leads to the canal of San Marco, beneath the Bridge of Sighs, thou wilt find Jacopo. Give him the packet; and, should he demand it, withhold not the ring. Wait his bidding, and return with the answer."

Gino received this commission with profound respect, but with an awe he could not conceal. Habitual deference to his master appeared to struggle with deep distaste for the office he was required to perform; and there was even some manifestation of a more principled reluctance, in his hesitating yet humble manner. If Don Camillo noted the air and countenance of his menial at all, he effectually concealed it.

"At the arched passage of the palace, beneath the Bridge of Sighs," he coolly added; "and let thy arrival there be timed, as near as may be, to the first hour of the night."

"I would, Signore, that you had been pleased to command Giorgio and me to row you to Padua!"

"The way is long. Why this sudden wish to weary thyself?"

"Because there is no Doge's palace, nor any Bridge of Sighs, nor any dog of Jacopo Frontoni among the meadows."

"Thou hast little relish for this duty; but thou must know that what the master commands it is the duty of a faithful follower to perform. Thou wert born my vassal, Gino Monaldi; and though trained from boyhood in this occupation of a gondolier, thou art properly a being of my fiefs in Napoli."

"St. Gennaro make me grateful for the honor, Signore! But there is not a water-seller in the streets of Venice, nor a mariner on her canals, who does not wish this Jacopo anywhere but in the bosom of Abraham. He is the terror of every young lover, and of all the urgent creditors on the islands."

"Thou seest, silly babbler, there is one of the former, at least, who does not hold him in dread. Thou wilt seek him beneath the Bridge of Sighs, and, showing the signet, deliver the package according to my instructions."

"It is certain loss of character to be seen speaking with the miscreant! So lately as yesterday, I heard Annina, the pretty daughter of the old wine-seller on the Lido, declare, that to be seen once in company with Jacopi Frontoni was as bad as to be caught twice bringing old rope from the arsenal, as befell Roderigo, her mother's cousin."

"Thy distinctions savor of the morals of the Lido. Remember to exhibit the ring, lest he distrust thy errand."

"Could not your eccellenza set me about clipping the wings of the lion, or painting a better picture than Tiziano di Vecelli? I have a mortal dislike even to pass the mere compliments of the day with one of your cut-throats. Were any of our gondoliers to see me in discourse with the man, it might exceed your eccellenza's influence to get me a place in the regatta."

"If he detain thee, Gino, thou wilt wait his pleasure; and if he dismiss thee at once, return hither with all expedition, that I may know the result."

"I very well know, Signor Don Camillo, that the honor of a noble is more tender of reproach than that of his followers, and that the stain upon the silken robe of a senator is seen farther than the spot upon a velvet jacket. If any one unworthy of your eccellenza's notice has dared to offend, here are Giorgio and I, ready, at any time, to show how deeply we can feel an indignity which touches our master's credit; but a hireling of two, or ten, or even of a hundred sequins!"

"I thank thee for the hint, Gino. Go thou and sleep in thy gondola, and bid Giorgio come into my cabinet."

"Signore!"

"Art thou resolute to do none of my biddings?"

"Is it your eccellenza's pleasure that I go to the Bridge of Sighs by the footways of the streets, or by the canals?"

"There may be need of a gondola—thou wilt go with the oar."

"A tumbler shall not have time to turn round before the answer of Jacopo shall be here."

With this sudden change of purpose the gondolier quitted the room, for the reluctance of Gino disappeared the moment he found the confidential duty assigned him by his master was likely to be performed by another. Descending rapidly by a secret stair, instead of entering the vestibule where half a dozen menials of different employments were in waiting, he passed by one of the narrow corridors of the palace into an inner court, and thence by a low and unimportant gate into an obscure alley which communicated with the nearest street.

Though the age is one of so great activity and intelligence, and the Atlantic is no longer a barrier even to the ordinary amusements of life, a great majority of Americans have never had an opportunity of personally examining the remarkable features of a region, of which the town that Gino now threaded with so much diligence is not the least worthy of observation. Those who have been so fortunate as to have visited Italy, therefore, will excuse us if we make a brief, but what we believe useful digression, for the benefit of those who have not had that advantage.

The city of Venice stands on a cluster of low sandy islands. It is probable that the country which lies nearest to the gulf, if not the whole of the immense plain of

Lombardy itself, is of alluvial formation. Whatever may have been the origin of that wide and fertile kingdom, the causes which have given to the Lagunes their existence, and to Venice its unique and picturesque foundation, are too apparent to be mistaken. Several torrents which flow from the valleys of the Alps pour their tribute into the Adriatic at this point. Their waters come charged with the débris of the mountains, pulverized nearly to their original elements. Released from the violence of the stream, these particles have necessarily been deposited in the gulf, at the spot where they have first become subjected to the power of the sea. Under the influence of counteracting currents, eddies, and waves, the sands have been thrown into submarine piles, until some of the banks have arisen above the surface, forming islands, whose elevation has been gradually augmented by the decay of vegetation. A glance at the map will show that, while the Gulf of Venice is not literally, it is practically, considered with reference to the effect produced by the southeast wind called the Sirocco, at the head of the Adriatic. This accidental circumstance is probably the reason why the Lagunes have a more determined character at the mouths of the minor streams that empty themselves here than at the mouths of most of the other rivers, which equally flow from the Alps or the Apennines into the same shallow sea.

The natural consequence of a current of a river meeting the waters of any broad basin, and where there is no base of rock, is the formation, at or near the spot where the opposing actions are neutralized, of a bank, which is technically called a bar. The coast of the Union furnishes constant evidence of the truth of this theory, every river, having its bar, with channels that are often shifted, or cleared, by the freshets, the gales, or the tides. The constant and powerful operations of the southeastern winds on one side, with the periodical increase of the Alpine streams on the other, have converted this bar at the entrance of the Venetian Lagunes, into a succession of long, low, sandy islands, which extend in a direct line nearly across the mouth of the gulf. The waters of the rivers have necessarily cut a few channels for their passage, or what is now a lagune would long since have become a lake. Another thousand years may so far change the character of this extraordinary estuary as to convert the channels of the bay into rivers, and the muddy banks into marshes and meadows, resembling those that are now seen for so many leagues inland.

The low margin of sand that, in truth, gives all its maritime security to the port of Venice and the Lagunes, is called the Lido di Palestrino. It has been artificially connected and secured, in many places, and the wall of the Lido (literally the beach), though incomplete, like most of the great and vaunted works of the other hemisphere, and more particularly of Italy, ranks with the mole of Ancona, and the sea-wall of Cherbourg. The hundred little islands which now contain the ruins of what, during the Middle Ages, was the mart of the Mediterranean, are grouped together within cannon-shot of the natural barrier. Art has united with nature to turn the whole to good account; and, apart from the influence of moral causes, the rivalry of a neighboring town, which has been fostered by political care, and the

gradual filling up of the waters, by the constant deposit of the streams, it would be difficult to imagine a more commodious, or a safer haven when entered, than that which Venice affords, even at this hour.

As all the deeper channels of the Lagunes have been preserved, the city is intersected in every direction by passages, which from their appearance are called canals, but which, in truth, are no more than so many natural branches of the sea. On the margin of these passages the walls of the dwellings arise literally from out of the water, since economy of room has caused their owners to extend their possessions to the very verge of the channel, in the manner that quays and wharfs are pushed into the streams in our own country. In many instances the islands themselves were no more than banks, which were periodically bare, and on all, the use of piles have been necessary to support the superincumbent loads of palaces, churches, and public monuments, under which, in the course of ages, the humble spits of sand have been made to groan.

The great frequency of the canals, and perhaps some attention to economy of labor, has given to by far the greater part of the buildings the facility of an approach by water. But, while nearly every building has one of its fronts on a canal, there are always communications by the rear with the interior passages of the town. It is a fault in most descriptions, that while the stranger hears so much of the canals of Venice, but little is said of her streets; still, narrow, paved, commodious, and noiseless passages of this description intersect all the islands, which communicate with each other by means of a countless number of bridges. Though the hoof of a horse or the rumbling of a wheel is never heard in these strait avenues, they are of great resort for all the purposes of ordinary intercourse.

Gino issued into one of these thoroughfares when he quitted the private passage which communicated with the palace of his master. He threaded the throng by which it was crowded, with a dexterity that resembled the windings of an eel among the weeds of the Lagunes. To the numerous greetings of his fellows he replied only by nods; nor did he once arrest his footsteps until they had led him through the door of a low and dark dwelling that stood in a quarter of the place which was inhabited by people of an inferior condition. Groping his way among casks, cordage, and rubbish of all descriptions, the gondolier succeeded in finding an inner and retired door that opened into a small room, whose only light came from a species of well that descended between the walls of the adjacent houses and that in which he was.

"Blessed St. Anne! Is it thou, Gino Monaldi!" exclaimed a smart Venetian grisette, whose tone and manner betrayed as much of coquetry as of surprise. "On foot, and by the secret door! Is this an hour to come on any of thy errands?"

"Truly, Annina, it is not the season for affairs with thy father, and it is something early for a visit to thee. But there is less time for words than for action, just now. For the sake of San Teodoro, and that of a constant and silly young man, who, if

not thy slave, is at least thy dog, bring forth the jacket I wore when we went together to see the merry-making at Fusina."

"I know nothing of thy errand, Gino, nor of thy reason for wishing to change thy master's livery for the dress of a common boatman. Thou art far more comely with those silken flowers than in this faded velveteen; and if I have ever said aught in commendation of its appearance, it was because we were bent on merry-making, and being one of the party, it would have been churlish to have withheld a word of praise to a companion, who, as thou knowest, does not dislike a civil speech in his own praise."

"Zitto, zitto! here is no merry-making and companions, but a matter of gravity, and one that must be performed off-hand. The jacket, if thou lovest me!"

Annina, who had not neglected essentials while she moralized on motives, threw the garment on a stool that stood within reach of the gondolier's hand, as he made this strong appeal, in a way to show that she was not to be surprised out of a confession of this sort, even in the most unguarded moment.

"If I love thee, truly! Thou hast the jacket, Gino, and thou mayest search in its pockets for an answer to thy letter, which I do not thank thee for having got the duca's secretary to indite. A maiden should be discreet in affairs of this sort; for one never knows but he may make a confidant of a rival."

"Every word of it is as true as if the devil himself had done the office for me, girl," muttered Gino, uncasing himself from his flowery vestment, and as rapidly assuming the plainer garment he had sought. "The cap, Annina, and the mask!"

"One who wears so false a face, in common, has little need of a bit of silk to conceal his countenance," she answered, throwing him, notwithstanding, both the articles he required.

"This is well. Father Battista himself, who boasts he can tell a sinner from a penitent merely by the savor of his presence, would never suspect a servitor of Don Camillo Monforte in this dress. Cospetto! but I have half a mind to visit that knave of a Jew, who has got thy golden chain in pledge, and give him a hint of what may be the consequences, should he insist on demanding double the rate of interest we agreed on."

"Twould be Christian justice! but what would become of thy matter of gravity the while, Gino, and of thy haste to enter on its performance?"

"Thou sayest truly, girl. Duty above all other things; though to frighten a grasping Hebrew may be as much of a duty as other matters. Are all thy father's gondolas in the water?"

"How else could he be gone to the Lido, and my brother Luigi to Fusina, and the two serving-men on the usual business to the islands, or how else should I be alone?"

"Diavolo! is there no boat in the canal?"

"Thou art in unwonted haste, Gino, now thou hast a mask and jacket of velvet. I know not that I should suffer one to enter my father's house when I am in it alone, and take such disguises to go abroad, at this hour. Thou wilt tell me thy errand, that I may judge of the propriety of what I do."

"Better ask the Three Hundred to open the leaves of their book of doom! Give me the key of the outer door, girl, that I may go my way."

"Not till I know whether this business is likely to draw down upon my father the displeasure of the Senate. Thou knowest, Gino, that I am—"

"Diamine! There goes the clock of San Marco, and I tarry past my hour. If I am too late, the fault will rest with thee."

"Twill not be the first of thy oversights which it has been my business to excuse. Here thou art, and here shalt thou remain, until I know the errand which calls for a mask and jacket, and all about this matter of gravity."

"This is talking like a jealous wife instead of a reasonable girl, Annina. I have told thee that I am on business of the last importance, and that delay may bring heavy calamities."

"On whom? What is thy business? Why art thou, whom in general it is necessary to warn from this house by words many times repeated, now in such a haste to leave it?"

"Have I not told thee, girl, 'tis an errand of groat concern to six noble families, and if I fail to be in season there may be a strife—ay, between the Florentine and the Republic!"

"Thou hast said nothing of the sort, nor do I put faith in thy being an ambassador of San Marco. Speak truth for once, Gino Monaldi, or lay aside thy mask and jacket, and take up thy flowers of Sant' Agata."

"Well, then, as we are friends, and I have faith in thy discretion, Annina, thou shalt know the truth to the extremity, for I find the bell has only tolled the quarters, which leaves me yet a moment for confidence."

"Thou lookest at the wall, Gino, and art consulting thy wits for some plausible lie!"

"I look at the wall because conscience tells me that too much weakness for thee is about to draw me astray from duty. What thou takest for deceit is only shame and modesty."

"Of that we shall judge, when the tale is told."

"Then listen. Thou hast heard of the affair between my master and the niece of the Roman marehese, who was drowned in the Giudecca by the carelessness of an

Ancona-man, who passed over the gondola of Pietro as if his felucca had been a galley of state?"

"Who has been upon the Lido the month past without hearing the tale repeated, with every variation of a gondolier's anger?"

"Well, the matter is likely to come to a conclusion this night; my master is about to do, as I fear, a very foolish thing."

"He will be married!"

"Or worse! I am sent in all haste and secrecy in search of a priest."

Annina manifested strong interest in the fiction of the gondolier. Hither from a distrusted temperament, long habit, or great familiarity with the character of her companion, however, she did not listen to his explanation with-out betraying some doubts of its truth.

"This will be a sudden bridal feast!" she said, after a moment of pause. "'Tis well that few are invited, or its savor might be spoiled by the Three Hundred! To what convent art thou sent?"

"My errand is not particular. The first that may be found, provided he be a Franciscan, and a priest likely to have bowels for lovers in haste."

"Don Camillo Monforte, the heir of an ancient and great line, does not wive with so little caution. Thy false tongue has been trying to deceive me, Gino; but long use should have taught thee the folly of the effort. Unless thou sayest truth, not only shalt thou not go to thy errand, but here art thou prisoner at my pleasure."

"I may have told thee what I expect will shortly happen, rather than what has happened. But Don Camillo keeps me so much upon the water of late, that I do little besides dream, when not at the oar."

"It is vain to attempt deceiving me, Gino, for thine eye speaketh truth, let thy tongue and brains wander where they will. Drink of this cup, and disburden thy conscience like a man."

"I would that thy father would make the acquaintance of Stefano Milano," resumed the gondolier, taking a long breath, after a stall longer draught. "'Tis a padrone of Calabria, who oftentimes brings into the port excellent liquors of his country, and who would pass a cask of the red lachryma christi through the Broglio itself, and not a noble of them all should see it. The man is here at present, and, if thou wilt, he shall not be long without coming into terms with thee for a few skins."

"I doubt if he have better liquors than this which hath ripened upon the sands of the Lido. Take another draught, for the second taste is thought to be better than the first."

"If the wine improve in this manner, thy father should be heavy-hearted at the sight of the lees. 'Twould be no more than charity to bring him and Stefano acquainted."

"Why not do it immediately? His felucca is in the port, thou sayest, and thou canst lead him hither by the secret door and the lanes."

"Thou forgettest my errand. Don Camillo is not used to be served the second. Cospetto! 'Twere a pity that any other got the liquor which I am certain the Calabrian has in secret."

"This errand can be no matter of a moment, like that of being sure of wine of the quality thou namest; or, if it be, thou canst first despatch thy master's business, and then to the port, in quest of Stefano. That the purchase may not fail, I will take a mask and be thy companion, to see the Calabrian. Thou knowest my father hath much confidence in my judgment in matters like this."

While Gino stood half stupefied and half delighted at this proposition, the ready and wily Annina made some slight change in her outer garments, placed a silken mask before her face, applied a key to the door, and beckoned to the gondolier to follow.

The canal with which the dwelling of the wine-dealer communicated was narrow, gloomy, and little frequented. A gondola of the plainest description was fastened near, and the girl entered it, without appearing to think any further arrangement necessary. The servant of Don Camillo hesitated a single instant, but having seen that his half-meditated project of escaping by the use of another boat could not be accomplished for want of means, he took his wonted place in the stern, and began to ply the oar with mechanical readiness.