

**LETTERS FROM THE NORTH  
OF ITALY ADDRESSED  
TO HENRY HALLAM, ESQ.  
IN TWO VOLUMES. VOL. II**

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Letters from the North of Italy Addressed to Henry Hallam, Esq. In Two Volumes. Vol. II by  
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**WILLIAM STEWART ROSE**

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# LETTERS

FROM THE

## NORTH OF ITALY.

ADDRESSED TO

HENRY HALLAM, Esq.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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With discourse that shifts and changes,  
 That at random roves and ranges,  
 Hither, thither, here and there,  
 Over ocean, earth and air ;  
 To the pole and to the tropic,  
 Overrunning every topic—  
 —Tell us, is he drunk or mad?  
 —No, believe me, grave and sad.

*THE BIRDS, MS. Translation.*

### VOL. II.

LONDON:

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.

1819.

LETTERS  
FROM THE  
NORTH OF ITALY.

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LETTER XXXII.

*On the Venetian Dialect—its Origin and Character—  
Venetian Poetry and Music, as connected with it—  
On the other Dialects of Italy.*

Venice, November, 1817.

THE Venetian is the language generally spoken here, and indeed in all the considerable towns of this state, except a few, such as Brescia and Bergamo, which have a dialect of their own. Of such towns it may be observed, that they were not comprehended in the tract of country inhabited by the ancient *Veneti*, but settled by the Cisalpine Gauls.

The colour of the ancient language of this people glimmered through their Latin, as may

be seen in inscriptions collected by *Maffei*,\* and it should seem probable that the original dialects of the different races of settlers in Italy are one remote cause of the variety of jargons which at present prevail there.

Of these the Venetian is undoubtedly the best. It is softer and more winning than the Tuscan, though it falls far beneath it in dignity and force. The judgment however of a foreigner is of little weight. It has had better testimonies borne to its merits by *Bettinelli*, and a host of Italian writers, who may naturally be supposed to have had a nicer and more discriminating sense of its perfections. In all the lighter and gayer walks of poetry it is delightful; and the Venetian verse is, I should say, compared with the verse of other nations, very much what Venetian painting is as to that of the rest of Europe.

Venice is indeed a little world by itself, with arts of its own and manners of its own. It is original in almost every thing; in its language, its pictures, its poetry, and its music; which,

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\* The Latin lapidary inscriptions found in the subalpine towns of Italy often mark the provinciality of the authors. Thus the W, one of the most characteristic marks of a transalpine alphabet, is to be found in those of the Gallic colonies.

however, may be all said to be *quales decet esse sorores*.

But our business is at present with the language. This is principally of Latin blood dashed with Greek, Slavonic, and I know not what. The mixture of Greek,\* which is infused in it, is however, perhaps, not greater than what prevails in the Italian; and, I believe, the original of many words which are usually considered as *aliens* might be found either in the pure or corrupter ages of latinity: for the inflections and deflections which these suffer, deceive our eyes, and it is often as difficult to trace such in their new forms, as it is to recognize the root of a plant in the variety and luxuriance of its branches. Who, for instance, would at first sight imagine that the Latin word *forma* was only the Doric  $\mu\omicron\rho\phi\alpha$  turned inside out? or what Frenchmen would recognize wasp in the *waps* of provincial English? The same principle of change naturally prevails in the Italian dialects, and I recollect being called upon by a lower Florentine to look at a certain garden "where there were *staiute*."

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\* Many familiar Venetian words are taken from the Greek, as *Magari!* (*Μαχαριστος*), which answers to the conditional *felice me!* of the Italian.



The instances I have quoted are of one description; there is a much larger class of another, which follow the natural and uniform bent of the language. Thus *caleghier*, which has puzzled some etymologists, is Venetian for a shoe-maker: this word should, according to the Italian rules of inflection, be *calegajo*, as *botteghier* makes *bottegajo*. Now considering the thing under this point of view, we see that *er* and *ajo* are mere tails, and that the body of the word is *caliga*, the short boot amongst the Romans, from which Caligula took his name. Following therefore a simple rule of analogy, *caleghier* is a boot or shoe-maker.

But referring to what I have said in a preceding paragraph as well as in the last, I have no doubt that one skilled in disentangling syllables, which get absolutely matted in time, might find in *Du Cange* the parentage of many words, whose derivation most puzzles us in Venetian.

Still there are vocables which cannot be ascribed to a Latin stem. Thus much is certain. But the mode of their introduction may be a subject of doubt and inquiry. Some contend (and such is the vulgar opinion) that the influx of these is to be ascribed to the intercourse of the Venetians with the barbarians, and the Greeks of Constantinople. A very little

consideration however will shew the fallacy of such a supposition.\*

It is to be observed that the language is very nearly the same throughout the tract of country which has been termed inland and maritime Venice; that is, the region inhabited by the ancient *Veneti*, which corresponds, in a great degree, with the modern limits of the Venetian state. Now it is quite clear that the dialect of maritime Venice could not have received accessions of speech from the barbarians, for they never entered the lagoon; and it is equally clear that many parts of inland Venice were as little likely to naturalize Greek words from Constantinople, since they had no communication with that city.

Could we suppose that the candle had been thus lit at both ends, each would retain some signs of such a process, but this is so far from being the case, that the language of Venice is the same as that of Verona, and I should say that as little difference, in this respect, existed between the two cities, as may be traced between two contiguous counties in England. Reasoning therefore from the uniformity of their

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\* See *Filiasi su' primi e secondi Veneti*.

dialect, even at the two extremities of the tract through which it is spoken, is it not a fair induction that the aliens, to which I have alluded, had been for ages and ages denized in the language?

Let us try this theory a little farther. All writers are agreed that the ancient *Veneti*, or Venetians, were a race differing in blood from the Gallic tribes who peopled the rest of Lombardy. *Lanzi*, almost the only man who has carried right principles of reasoning into investigations of national monuments, and who may be classed amongst the most ingenious and accurate of authors, I think, supposes the *Veneti* to have been a Greek and Celtic mixture, observing, that the infusion of Greek which he discovered in their inscriptions was purer than that which he found in the remains of the Etrurians.\* This then may, at least, account for whatever there *was* or *is* of Greek in the language of this people. But whatever were the elements of their tongue, it is notorious they *had* one to themselves, however it was composed. This was afterwards, as that of all the aboriginal Italians, merged in the Latin, but many proofs might

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\* *Saggio di Lingua Etrusca.*