

THE SEA-CHARM OF VENICE

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The Sea-Charm of Venice by Stopford A. Brooke

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VENICE

BY *Augustus*
STOPFORD A. BROOKE



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WHEN Attila came storming into Europe, his conquests may be said to have given rise to two great sea-powers. His rush on the north along the Baltic shores probably caused so much pressure on the continental English, that many of them, all the Engle especially, left their lands, found another country in Britain, and gave it the name of England. It is now, and has been for some centuries, the mistress of the seas, both in commerce and in war. But when Attila drove his war-plough southward, he crossed the Alps, and descended on the cities of the plain between Trieste and the Po. When he reached

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Altinum, Aquileia, and the other towns bordering on the lagoon, the Roman nobles, many of whom might be called merchant-princes, and their dependants fled to Torcello, to Rialto, and to other islands where, before the conqueror came, they had established depôts for their trading, where the fishermen and boatmen were already in their pay. When the Goths followed the invading track of Attila, the emigration of the Roman inhabitants of the mainland to the lagoon continued year after year; and out of this emigrant flight grew Venice, the Queen of the Sea.

England was Teutonic, Venice was Roman; and as in England the Teuton destroyed the influence of Rome, so the Teutonic invasion of Italy, with all its new elements, never touched Venice. The Gothic influence left her uninfluenced. ~~She alone in Italy was pure Roman.~~ The English race was mixed with the Celtic race, but the Teutonic elements prevailed. But Venice

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was unmixed. She was always singularly Roman right down to the dreadful days of her final conquest, so that it may well be said that Manin was *ultimus Romanorum*. In constitution, in laws, in traditions, in the temper of her citizens, in manners, in her greatness, her splendour, even in her unbridled luxury and her decay, she was Roman to the end. Italy was transmuted by the Goth, but not Venice.

But owing to her origin she was *Rome at Sea*; and being on the edge of a sea which naturally carried her war and trade to the East, she was more of eastern than of western Rome. Byzantium, not the Italian Rome, was her nursing mother, and poured into her the milk of her art, her commerce, and her customs. By this, also, she remained outside of Italy, and her position, anchored in the sea off the Italian coast, is, as it were, a symbol of her double relation to Western and Eastern Rome. Whatever change took place in her Roman nature was

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made by the spirit of the sea on which she had made her home. Commerce was forced upon her, and it was not difficult for her to take it up, for the Roman senators and patricians of Altinum, Padua, Concordia, and Aquileia who took refuge on the islands, had been traders before they founded Venice, and only developed more fully in Venice that commerce which they had practised on the mainland. Aquileia had been for years before the barbaric invasion the emporium of a trade with Byzantium and the Danube. The trade was transferred to Venice. It did not, then, arise in Venice, but it was so greatly increased during the centuries that the new city held the east in fee. From every port on the Mediterranean, and from lands and seas beyond that inland lake, the trade of east and west poured into Venice. To protect her commerce she became a sea-power. Her struggle for centuries with the pirates formed her navy and her seamen, both

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Venetians and mercenaries, into the mighty instrument of naval war they became when the strife with the pirates closed in victory. But her captains, her senators, the great dukes who led the navy into battle, led it for the sake of her commerce, and were themselves, as Shakespeare made Antonio, "royal merchants," such as they had been of old in Padua, Altinum, and Aquileia; and always Romans. Wherever then we touch Venice we touch the sea out of which she was born, by which she was nursed, and which when she reached her full age, she wedded and commanded.

To realize the origins of the city, and this sea-spirit in her history and her life, to recall in memory the centuries she lasted, and to feel the sentiment of the splendid sorrow, strife and glory of the tale, it is well to row to Torcello, to climb to the top of the cathedral tower, and to look out from the low-arched windows, north and south, east and west. The door used always