

**ST. MARK'S REST.
THE HISTORY OF
VENICE, PART I**

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St. Mark's rest. The history of Venice, Part I by John Ruskin

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JOHN RUSKIN

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THE HISTORY OF VENICE

*WRITTEN FOR THE HELP OF THE FEW TRAVELLERS WHO
STILL CARE FOR HER MONUMENTS.*

BY

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PART I.



GEORGE ALLEN,

SUNNYSIDE, ORPINGTON, KENT.

1877.

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P R E F A C E .

GREAT nations write their autobiographies in three manuscripts;—the book of their deeds, the book of their words, and the book of their art. Not one of these books can be understood unless we read the two others ; but of the three, the only quite trustworthy one is the last. The acts of a nation may be triumphant by its good fortune; and its words mighty by the genius of a few of its children : but its art, only by the general gifts and common sympathies of the race.

Again, the policy of a nation may be compelled, and, therefore, not indicative of its true character. Its words may be false, while yet the race remain unconscious of their falsehood ; and no historian can assuredly detect the hypocrisy. But art is always instinctive ; and the honesty or pretence

of it are therefore open to the day. The Delphic oracle may or may not have been spoken by a honest priestess,—we cannot tell by the words of it; a liar may rationally believe them a lie, such as he would himself have spoken; and a true man, with equal reason, may believe them spoken in truth. But there is no question possible in art: at a glance, (when we have learned to read,) we know the religion of Angelico to be sincere, and of Titian, assumed.

The evidence, therefore, of the third book is the most vital to our knowledge of any nation's life; and the history of Venice is chiefly written in such manuscript. It once lay open on the waves, miraculous, like St. Cuthbert's book,—a golden legend on countless leaves: now, like Baruch's roll, it is being cut with the penknife, leaf by leaf, and consumed in the fire of the most brutish of the fiends. What fragments of it may yet be saved in blackened scroll, like those withered Cottonian relics in our National library, of which so much has been redeemed by love and skill, this book will help you, partly, to read. Partly,—

for I know only myself in part ; but what I tell you, so far as it reaches, will be truer than you have heard hitherto, because founded on this absolutely, faithful witness, despised by other historians, if not wholly unintelligible to them.

I am obliged to write shortly, being too old now to spare time for anything more than needful work ; and I write at speed, careless of afterwards remediable mistakes, of which adverse readers may gather as many as they choose : that to which such readers are adverse will be found truth that can abide any quantity of adversity.

As I can get my chapters done, they shall be published in this form, for such service as they can presently do. The entire book will consist of not more than twelve such parts, with two of appendices, forming two volumes : if I can get what I have to say into six parts, with one appendix, all the better.

Two separate little guides, one to the Academy, the other to San Giorgio de' Schiavoni, will, I hope, be ready with the opening numbers of this book, which must depend somewhat on their collateral

illustration; and what I find likely to be of service to the traveller in my old 'Stones of Venice' is in course of re-publication, with further illustration of the complete works of Tintoret. But this cannot be ready till the autumn; and what I have said of the mightiest of Venetian masters, in my lecture on his relation to Michael Angelo, will be enough at present to enable the student to complete the range of his knowledge to the close of the story of 'St. Mark's Rest.'

ST. MARK'S REST.

CHAPTER I.

THE BURDEN OF TYRE.

Go first into the Piazzetta, and stand anywhere in the shade, where you can well see its two granito pillars.

Your Murray tells you that they are 'famous,' and that the one is "surmounted by the bronze lion of St. Mark, the other by the statue of St. Theodore, the Protector of the Republic."

It does not, however, tell you why, or for what the pillars are 'famous.' Nor, in reply to a question which might conceivably occur to the curious, why St. Theodore should protect the Republic by standing on a crocodile; nor whether the "bronze lion of St. Mark" was cast by Sir Edwin Landseer,—or some more ancient and ignorant person;—nor what these rugged corners of limestone rock, at the bases of the granite, were perhaps once in the shape of. Have you any idea why, for the sake of any such things, these pillars were once, or should

yet be, more renowned than the Monument, or the column of the Place Vendôme, both of which are much bigger?

Well, they are famous, first, in memorial of something which is better worth remembering than the fire of London, or the achievements of the great Napoleon. And they are famous, or used to be, among artists, because they are beautiful columns; nay, as far as we old artists know, the most beautiful columns at present extant and erect in the conveniently visitable world.

Each of these causes of their fame I will try in some dim degree to set before you.

I said they were set there in memory of *things*,—not of the man who did the things. They are to Venice, in fact, what the Nelson column would be to London, if, instead of a statue of Nelson and a coil of rope, on the top of it, we had put one of the four Evangelists, and a saint, for the praise of the Gospel and of Holiness:—trusting the memory of Nelson to our own souls.

However, the memory of the Nelson of Venice, being now seven hundred years old, has more or less faded from the heart of Venice herself, and seldom finds its way into the heart of a stranger. Somewhat concerning him, though a stranger, you may care to hear, but you must hear it in quiet; so let your boatman take you across to San Giorgio Maggiore;