

PART I.—THE STORY

CHAPTER I

The Foundation at Rialto

“ Venice seems a type
Of life—'twixt blue and blue extends, a stripe,
As life, the somewhat, hangs 'twixt nought and nought.”

—*Browning.*

OF the original home of the earliest settlers in that province of North Italy known to the Latins as Venetia, little can be told with certainty. Historians and antiquarians are pleased to bring them, under the name of Heneti or Eneti, from Paphlagonia, and explain some characteristic traits they subsequently developed—the love of colour and of display, the softness of their dialect—by their eastern origin. They were an independent, thriving and organised community when the Roman Empire first accepted their aid in the fierce struggle against the invading Gauls, and so they continued to be until they were absorbed as a province of the Empire. The land they cultivated, “mervailous in corne, wine, oyle, and all maner of frutes,” was one of the riches in Europe. Its soil was formed by ages of alluvial deposit brought

by the rapid streams that drain the southern slopes of the Alps.

The traveller who enters Italy by any of the Alpine passes will not fail to note the contrast between the northern streams and the more torrential water-ways of the south, which, however, being soon checked by the deposit they bring, grow slack and fray out into many and varying channels, through which the waters find their way with small, at times almost imperceptible, flow into the sea. So lazily do the rivers discharge that the north-east shores of the Adriatic are formed of sandbanks, shoals and islets, which for nigh a hundred miles from Cavarzere to Grado constituted the *dogado* of Venice. The famous Venetian lagoon is confined to some thirty miles north of Chioggia, and is divided into the *Laguna morta*, where the tide is scarcely felt, and the *Laguna viva*, where the sea is studded with numerous islands and islets protected by the *lidi*, a long line of remarkable breakwaters formed by the prevailing set of the current to the west, with narrow openings or *Porti* through which the shallow tide ebbs and flows. This natural barrier has made the existence of Venice possible, for the islands on which the city is built afforded a refuge safe alike from attack by sea or land. The colonisation, development and defence of these lagoons and islands by settlers from the mainland make up the early history of Venice. Some misapprehension exists as to the nature of these settlements. The picture of terror-stricken and despoiled fugitives from the cities of Venetia escaping from hordes of pursuing Huns or Lombards to seek a refuge in the barren and uncertain soil of mud-banks and storm-swept islands is true in part only. In many cases the movement was a deliberately organised migration of urban communities, with their officers, their craftsmen, their tools, their sacred vessels, even the very stones of their churches, to towns and villages already known to them. Among the settlers were men of all classes—patrician and plebeian, rich and poor.

“But they would receive no man of servile condition, or a murderer, or of wicked life.”

Some islands were already inhabited by a hardy race of



ON THE LAGOONS

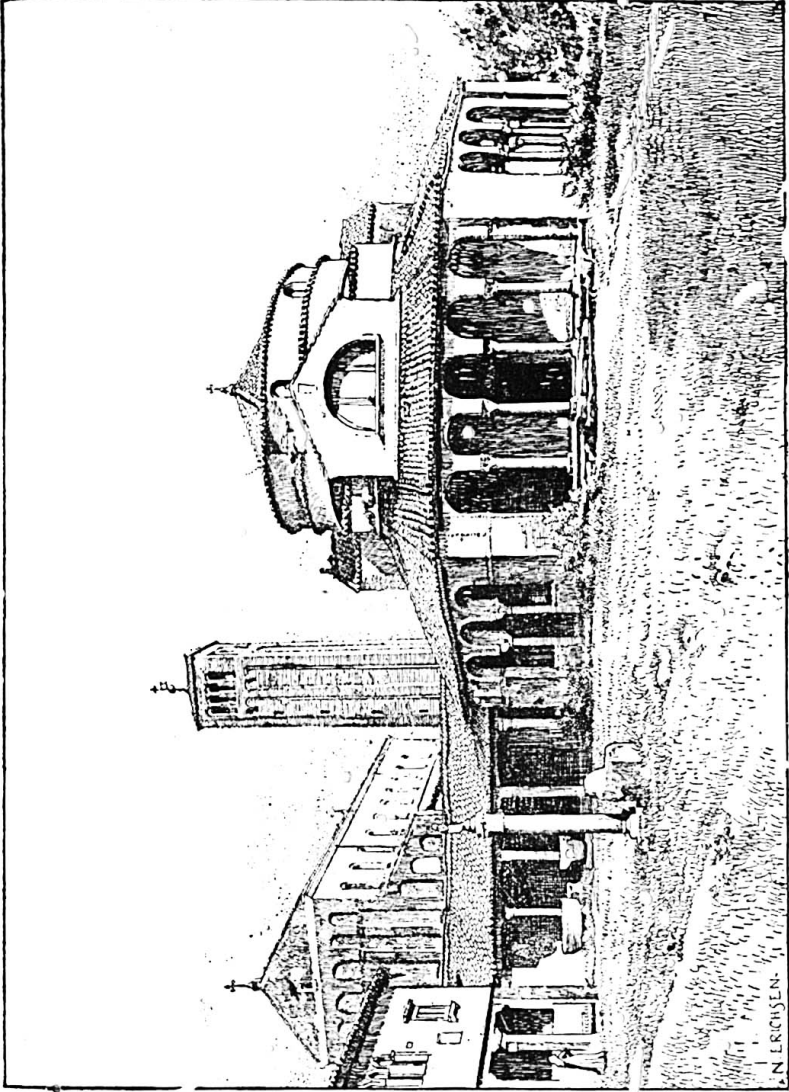
pilots and fishermen: others by prosperous Roman patricians, with their villas, farms, gardens and orchards. Grado was a busy commercial settlement with rich vineyards and meadows, and joined to the mainland by a causeway that led to Aquileia. Heraclea was rather a mainland than a lagoon city; Torcello is said to have been a fashionable Roman watering-place, and Roman remains have been found at S. Giurgio Maggiore. Much of the ground was covered with pine forests, the haunts of game and other wild creatures. For a long time the islands were not regarded by the settlers as abiding places. Again and again many of them returned to their old homes on the mainland when the invaders' force was spent. It was only in 568 that the Lombards, more cruel, or perhaps more systematic in their oppression than Marcoman or Hun, finally determined the Venetians to make the lagoons their permanent home.

Who of us northmen that has reached the descending slope of an Alpine pass, it may be through mist and sleet and snow, to gaze upon the rich and luscious plains of Lombardy or Venetia smiling with vine and fruit and corn; who that has felt the warm breath of sun-steeped Italy caressing his face as he emerges from northern gloom, but

will feel a twinge of envy which is akin to covetousness, and which in strong and masterful races quickly develops into lust of conquest?

In the fifth century of our era the Roman Empire decaying, like most giants, at the extremities, lay defenceless before the irroads of those forceful, elemental peoples who from north and east swept down the passes to ravage the garden of Italy and to enslave her inhabitants. In 452 Venetia became the prey of God's scourge—Attila. Aquileia, now a poor village just within the Austrian frontier, but then a Roman city of the first rank, was plundered. Altinum, a city famous for its strength and wealth, resisted for a time but soon its inhabitants and those of Padua, Asolo, Belluno and other mainland cities forsook their homes and migrated to the lagoons.

The earliest settlements were twelve: Grado, Bibbione, Caorle, Jesolo (now Cavallino), Eraclea, Torcello, Burano, Rivoalto (now Venice), Malamocco, Poveglia, Cluges Minor (actual site now unknown, but not Sotto Marina, as sometimes stated), Cluges Major (now Chioggia). Of these, Grado was occupied by the Aquileians; Rivoalto and Malamocco by the Paduans; Eraclea by the Bellouesense; Torcello and Burano by the Altinese. To the pious imagination of chroniclers these migrations were not without divine admonition. In 568 the terrible Lombards were threatening Altinum, whose inhabitants entreated the help of heaven with tears and prayers and fastings; and, lo! they saw the doves and many other birds bearing their young in their beaks flying from their nests in the walls of the city. This was interpreted as a sign from God that they also were to expatriate themselves and seek safety in flight. They divided into three bodies, one of which turned to Istria, another to Ravenna. The third remained behind, uncertain whither to direct their steps. Three days they fasted, and at length a voice was heard saying: "*Salite alla torre e guardate agli astri.*" (Ascend the tower and look at the stars.)



S. FOSCA AND THE DUOMO, TORCELLO

J. N. L. ERCHSEN.

Their good Eishop Paul climbed the tower, and to his gaze the very stars of the firmament seemed to set themselves in



N. ERICHSEN.

PONTE S. GIUSTINA

a constellation that figured forth the fateful group of islands in the lagoon before him. His flock, following this warning from heaven, went forth, headed by their bishop and clergy bearing the sacred vessels and relics, and passed to an island high and fertile, which they called Torcello, from one of the twelve towers of their old city. The very hierarchy of heaven, from Our Lord and His Blessed Mother to St

Peter and the Baptist, even to Giustina, the martyred little maid of Padua, appeared to Mauro, the priest, in a vision, as he paced the sea shore, and in sweet voices bade him build here a church and there a church in their honour. The immigrants therefore had come to make the lagoons their permanent home. Their new city was organised. In process of time churches were built; trade guilds were formed; painters and mosaicists enriched the buildings. The marble seat on the grass-grown piazza of Torcello, to this day called Attila's chair, was probably the official seat of the tribune when he administered justice to the people.

It will be seen that no definite date can be assigned to the foundation of Venice, though Sanudo is very sure it was in "the year ccccxxi., on the xxv. of March, which was a Friday, that day on which our father Adam was created, when about the hour of nones the first stone of St Giacomo di Rivoalto was laid by the Paduans." The great diarist gives a charming picture of the earliest Venetians trading in fish and salt with their little barks to the neighbouring shores: "They were a lowly people, who esteemed mercy and innocency, and, above all, religion rather than riches. They affected not to clothe them with ornaments, nor to seek honours, but when need was they answered to the call."

There is little doubt that originally the settlers were subject to the Consuls at Padua, but in 466 they were strong enough to meet at Grado and to elect their own tribunes, one for each of the twelve communities. A passage in a famous letter of Cassiodorus to these *Tribuni Maritimi* in 523 affords the first glimpse in history of the lagoon folk. The secretary of Theodoric the Great writes urging them not to fail to transport the tribute of oil, honey and wine from Istria to Ravenna, and expatiates on their great security and the wonderful habitations that he has seen, like sea-birds' nests, half on land, half on sea, or like the cyclades spread over the broad bosom of the waters. Their land is made not by nature but by man, for the soil is



THE CUSTOMS HOUSE.

strengthened by flexible withy bands, and they oppose frail dykes to the waves of the sea. Their boats are tied to posts before their doors like horses are on the mainland. Rich and poor live in equality. They flee from the vice of envy, to which the whole world is enslaved. Instead of plough and scythe they handle cylinders. In their salt they produce a merchandise more desired than gold, so all the fruits of the earth are at their command.

About 530, when Narses the Eunuch began the great campaign which wrested the Italian dominions of the Emperors from the Goths, the Venetians gave him effective aid by transporting an army of Lombard mercenaries from Aquilina to Ravenna. As a reward Narses sent some Byzantine masters, who from the spoils of the enemy built the Church of St Theodore at Rivoalto on a plot of ground known as the *Broglio* or garden where now stands the Basilica of St Mark.

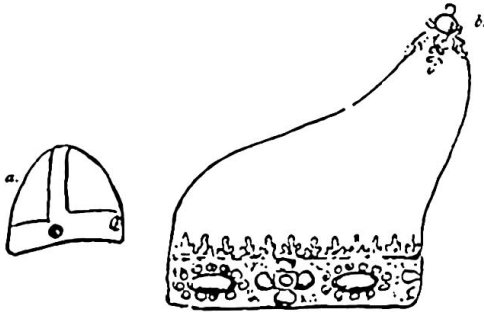
Scarcely, however, were the Goths defeated, when in 568 Alboin and his Lombards menaced the land. Longinus, who succeeded Narses in the exarchate of Ravenna, came to Venice and asked her aid as subject to the Emperor. He was given an honourable and festive welcome, but the Venetians had bought their freedom at a great price and stoutly refused to admit his claim. They declared that the second Venice which they had made in the waters was a mighty habitation and their very own by right of creation; that they feared no power of Prince or Emperor, for it could not reach them. They, however, furnished a ship and sent an embassy with Longinus to Constantinople, and in return for valuable trading rights, agreed to acknowledge the suzerainty of the Emperor if no formal oath were exacted.

In 584 the lagoon folk had so expanded that an additional tribune was chosen for each community. Of these *Tribuni majores* was formed a federal council, the original tribunes now serving as heads of local administrations.

The golden age so lovingly dwelt upon by the early

chroniclers was of short duration. Already, before the institution of the new tribunes, family and local feuds, the ambition of the tribunes and jealousy of the people, led to bloody affrays in the *Pinete* (pine forests) with which the *lidi* were clothed. Anarchy threatened the state; bands of Lombards under the Duke of Friuli plundered the churches of Heraclea and Grado. The crisis was met by the public spirit and wisdom of the Church. A general meeting (*Arengo*) was called by the Patriarch of Grado at Heraclea. Two vital problems came to the front—the organisation of

self-defence and the maintenance of public order. The whole Assembly having invoked the name of Christ, the great churchman stood forth, and after reviewing the political situation, proposed that all the tribunes should be relegated to purely local offices, and a *Capo* or chief elected for



a. EARLY DUCAL CAP FROM AN OLD MOSAIC IN ST MARK
b. DUCAL CAP OF DOGE MORO, 1462-1471, FROM
THE PORTRAIT IN S. GIOBBE

life. His new polity was approved and in 697 Pauluccic Anafesto was chosen first Doge and invested with sovereign powers. Thus was constituted the Dogeship of Venice which, save for a short interruption of six years, endured for eleven centuries. The Doge could nominate, degrade or dismiss all public officers, convoke or dissolve the *Arengo* and the synod. The appointment of Patriarchs and Bishops was subject to his veto. The military authority, entrusted to a Master of the soldiers, was subordinate to him; foreign affairs were in his hands, though the approval of the people was required to declare war or conclude peace. He could impose taxes; his feudal dues and rights of *corvée* were

extensive. His state was regal. When he went abroad, girt with a sword and surrounded by his guards, a state umbrella was held over him, lighted tapers were borne by his side, trumpets blared and banners waved. He sat enthroned in an ivory chair, holding a sceptre, and arrayed in a silk mantle with a fringe of gold fastened by a gold clasp over a tightly fitting tunic trimmed with ermine; he wore red hose and a high biretta richly jewelled, which was subsequently shortened by constricting the middle so as to form two lobes, one of which soon disappeared, and the familiar horned cap of the later Doges was evolved. A close cap of fine linen was worn beneath, so that when the biretta was raised his head should be covered as a mark of dignity. The Doge was no *fainéant*. He rose before the dawn, and having heard mass went forth to judge the people and transact the business of the day. On solemn occasions he gave his benediction. The blessing of God was invoked upon him in the litany. The election, more or less democratic until the abolition of the *Arengo* in 1423, was made by the whole people, who were summoned from Grado to Càvarzere. Their chosen one was acclaimed and carried shoulder high to the church, which he entered barefoot, and there swore to govern according to the laws and to work for the good of the people. The result of the election was communicated to the Pope and the Emperor; to the latter usually by the Doge's son in person.

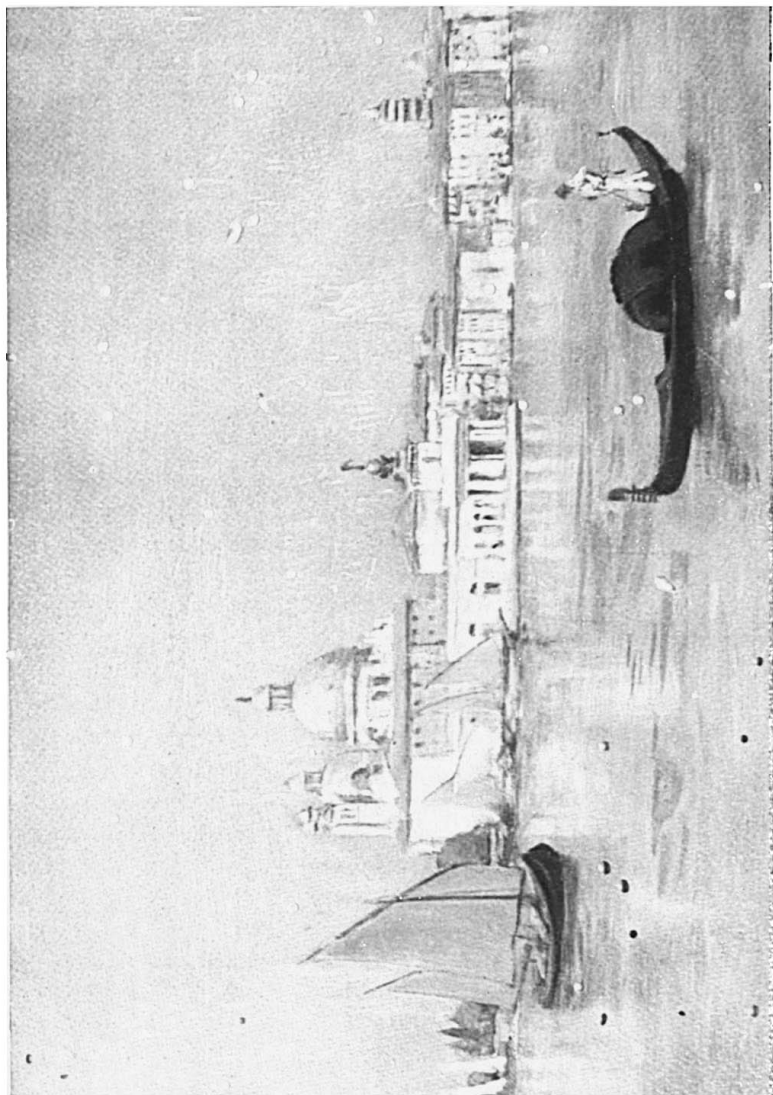
Anafesto had a difficult task. The young state lay between two mighty powers: Lombards or Franks and Pope in the west, the Byzantine Emperor in the east. Only by vigilance and prudence could she escape subjection. And these rival interests were active within her borders—aristocratic Heraclea leaning towards the Eastern Empire; democratic Malamocco and Jesolo towards the Western kingdoms and the Pope. One of the first acts of the new Doge, after securing internal peace, was to conclude a treaty with Liutprand, King of the Lombards, by which

the boundaries of the Republic were defined, and in return for an annual payment, valuable rights of wood-cutting and horse-breeding and trading were conceded. But political jealousy dies hard. Two powerful families revolted in 717, and the Doge perished in a civil broil in the Pineta of Jesolo.

During the reign of the third Doge, Orso of Heraclea, the Venetians were called to meet a new danger. The rise of the Iconoclasts in the early eighth century, and the zeal of their protagonist, the Emperor Leo III., had set east and west aflame. Leo's attempt to enforce the decree against the use of images in the western Church was met by an invitation to the Lombards from the Pope to attack the seat of the eastern power in Italy. War was the very breath of their nostrils, and they were not slow to respond. Ravenna was besieged and captured and the Pentapolis occupied.¹ The Exarch Paul fled to the lagoons and appealed to Orso for help. The fugitive enlarged on the danger to Venice of the advancing Lombards, now at their very door. The Doge agreed to furnish a fleet, and by successful strategy Ravenna was surprised and recaptured and the Exarchate restored. The gratified Emperor rewarded the Venetians by conferring the title of Hypatoꝛ (knight) on their Doge, who adopted it as a family name.

This imperial policy was, however, bitterly resented by the popular party. A civil war ensued which lasted two years, and ended in the defeat of the Heracleans, the murder of the Doge, and the banishment of his son. Another experiment in statecraft was now made. The Dogeship was abolished, and the Master of the soldiers appointed head of the State for a term of one year. This new departure proved disastrous. After six years of civil discord, the last of the Masters, a Heracleian, was captured and blinded by the opposite party. An *Aiengo* was called, this time at Malamocco, and a compromise effected. Deodato, son of Orso, a Heracleian, was made Doge at Malamocco, whither the capital was now

¹ Rimini, Pesaro, Fano, Sinigaglia and Ancona.



BASIN OF S. MARCO.

transferred. But Heraclea and Jesolo were rivals, fierce as ever, for the ducal chair. The internecine strife went on with its savage incidents. Assassination, blinding,¹ or banishment were the price of defeat. At length, by the election of Maurizio Galbaio in 764, "noble by race, nobler in deeds," the distracted state was ruled with wisdom and firmness, and faction for a time was silenced.

The epoch-making victory of Charles of the Hammer over the Arabs at Tours had drawn the eyes of all men to France, and to a mighty race of princes destined to change the face of Europe. The restless Lombards in 752 had reoccupied Ravenna and the Pentapolis, and the Pope turned to the new Carolingian dynasty for help against them. Pepin answered to the call, wrested the cities from their hands, and gave them to the Pope, who thus became a temporal sovereign. Twenty years later the papacy was again constrained to summon help. Charlemagne, Pepin's son, crossed the Alps by the Great St Bernard pass, fell like a thunderbolt of war on the Lombards, and in 774 their dominion was finally crushed by the capture of Desiderio, their King, and Pavia, their royal city. Romanin argues from the silence of the chroniclers that the Venetians took no active part in the siege of Pavia, but from an old inscription in Venetian, on a thin plate of hammered lead,² preserved in the British Museum, we learn that on the invitation of Charlemagne, the Venetians sent a fleet of twenty-four galleys, with four nobles who knew the art of war (*saveva far la guara*) up the Po to the siege, and had the honour of guarding the captive King. Venice had indeed watched every phase of the struggle,

¹ A method of disposing of a political enemy, so common in Italy, in the middle ages, that it was expressed by a word *abbacinare*, from the *bacino* or red hot basin of brass fixed before the eyes of the victim.

² See "Archæologia," vol. xlv. p. 128. This curious inscription purports to have been interpreted in 1202 by Marin Dandolo, Procurator of St Mark, from the Latin of an old and decayed parchment written by Orso Hypato of Heraclea.

seizing, as was her wont, any opportunity that offered for extending the trading privileges so vital to her existence. By secret information to the Church from her merchants at Constantinople, she had nipped a plot to recover the Exarchate, now for ever lost to the Greek Emperors. But in 781 Pepin, son of Charlemagne, had been crowned King of Italy by the Pope; the power of the Franks was growing apace, and their alliance with a territorial Pope alarmed the Heraclian party. They believed a wiser policy was to form an alliance with the weaker Empire far in the east against the Franks. In 778 Doge Maurizio Galbaio was permitted, on the plea of infirmity, to associate his son Giovanni with him, and on the death of Maurizio, the son stepped into his father's office, thus effecting a subtle change in the nature of the Dogeship, by no means pleasing to the democratic party. The Franks were not long in making their power felt. Venetian merchants had acquired some territory near Ravenna, and many trading centres in the neighbouring cities. They were incorrigible slave traders. Pope Zacharias, a generation before, had been moved to compassion on seeing in Rome groups of Christian slaves,¹ men and women, belonging to Venetian merchants, destined to be sold to the pagans in Africa. He paid their price and set them at liberty. Charlemagne had recently published an edict against the traffic in slaves, and now called on Pope Hadrian to take action. The Venetians were expelled from Ravenna and the Pentapolis. In 797 the new see of Olivolo which had been created a few years before to meet the growing needs of the population, became vacant, and the new Doge preferred Christophorus Damianus, a young Greek to the bishopric. The Patriarch of Grado, around whom the

¹ So late as 1428 a Russian female slave was sold by one friar to another for 52 sequins, with "right to dispose of her body and soul in perpetuity." The contract is quoted by Filiassi. In 1492 a Saracen slave, 15 years old, fetched 25 sequins.

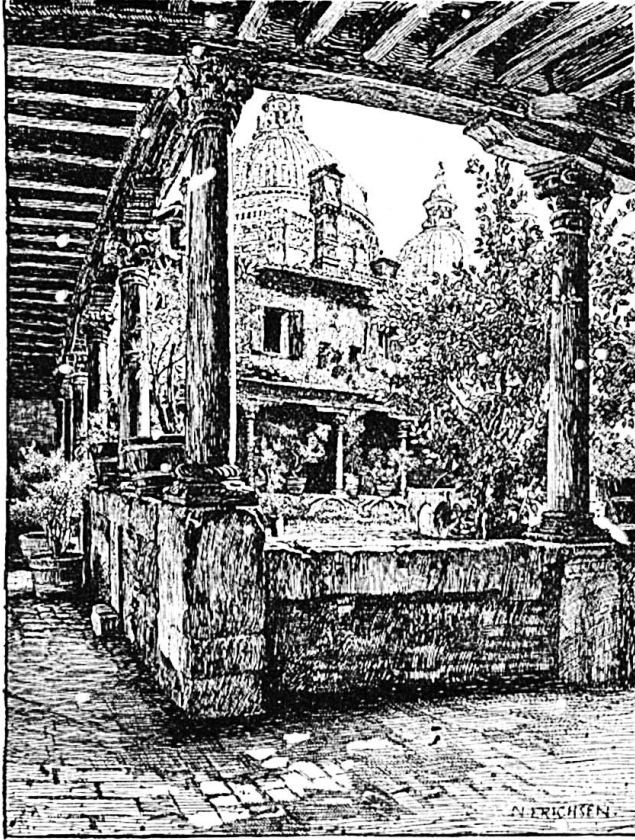
Frankish party centred, refused to consecrate one whom he regarded as a nominee of the Byzantine Emperor, and excommunicated Bishop and Doge. The Doge's answer was swift and terrible. He despatched his son Maurizio with a fleet to Grado; the city was attacked; the Patriarch captured, thrown from the tower of his palace, and dashed to pieces. To allay popular indignation, Fortunatus, a nephew of the murdered Patriarch was appointed in his stead. The new prelate soon showed of what stuff he was made. With infinite resource and indomitable purpose he set himself to avenge the insult to the Church, and, but for the premature discovery of the plot, would have wrought the destruction of the Doge and his party. Fortunatus fled to the court of Charlemagne, who was now created Holy Roman Emperor, and harbouring no tender feelings towards the rebellious children of the lagoons. Obelerio, tribune of Malamocco, and the other heads of the conspiracy found safety at Treviso, whence they stirred their partizans to action with decisive effect. The Doge and his son were exiled to Mantua; Obelerio was proclaimed Doge in 804; the triumph of the Frankish party was complete. The Heracleans, however, soon rallied. In their civil fury they fell upon Jesolo, and almost wiped it out. The Doge immediately led a punitive expedition to Heraclea, and wreaked a similar vengeance on that hot-bed of Byzantine faction. The situation was now felt to be unbearable. By general consent a meeting of the whole *dogado* was called, and it was decided that in order to make peace, the remaining populations of Heraclea and of Jesolo should be transported to Malamocco.

Fortunatus meanwhile was watching events at Istria. Under the sun of Charlemagne's favours he had waxed rich and powerful. He possessed four ships, and traded under royal patronage wherever the new western Emperor's power reached. By skilful diplomacy he effected his recall to Grado, and placed a Frankish partizan in the see of

Olivolo. But the Heracleans had lost their home, not their ideals and policy. They appealed to the Byzantine Emperor, and a Greek fleet sailed up the Adriatic. Fortunatus once again was a fugitive. The Doge and his party protested a loyalty to their suzerain, which in 809 was translated into acts by the despatch of a fleet to aid him to recover the exarchate for the Greeks. It was unsuccessful, but none the less irritating to the Pope and Emperor, who now determined to subdue the Venetians and incorporate them into the Holy Roman Empire of the West. The immediate cause of the rupture is not known, but when the princes of the earth are bent on war a pretext is seldom hard to find. A great empire, aiming at universal dominion, is ill at ease with a sturdy freedom-loving state on its borders, and the far-reaching arm of the invincible Carolingians was stretched forth to grasp, as they thought, an easy prey.

In the stress of a common danger, faction was silenced. Obelerio and his brother Beato, whom he had associated with him a year after he was proclaimed Doge, advised that the Venetians should agree with their adversary before it was too late, but a wave of popular indignation swept them from power, and Angelo Participazio, a Heracleian by birth, and one of the tribunes of Rivoalto, was made head of a provisional government of national defence. The churches were filled with earnest, determined men, entreating with fasting and prayer the divine aid in their hour of need; a call was made on every citizen at home and abroad to hasten to the defence of the fatherland. Provisions were accumulated, ships built, fortifications raised, channels blocked by chains and sunken hulks, guide posts drawn.

Meanwhile, King Pepin had summoned his allies, and a fleet sailed up to the lagoons. On the mainland the advance of the Frankish armies was irresistible; north and south they closed in on the Venetians. Grado soon fell; Brondolo, the Chioggie, and other cities were captured; fire and sword wasted their settlements. The *porti* of Brondolo, Chioggia,



CLOISTERS OF S. GREGORIO

and Pelestrina were forced, Malamocco¹ the capital threatened. At this crisis the momentous decision was taken to



FISHING BOATS

abandon Malamocco and concentrate at Rivoalto (Rialto), the compact group of islands between the mainland and the *lido*.

On the *lido* of Pelestrina, south of S. Pietro in Volta,

¹The original Malamocco, destroyed by flood in the twelfth century, was a fortified place girt with walls and towers, whose precise locality is not now known. It was situated on the open Adriatic, not far from the present Malamocco. Filiasi, writing about 1800, says the ruins used to be seen at low tide about a good stone's throw from the *lido*.

where the steamer to Chioggia now calls, is the little fishing village of Porto Secco. Here in olden times was a *porto* called Albiola. North of this passage was the city of Albiola on the *lido* which stretched towards Malamocco. South began the *lido* of Pelestrina. It was here that, according to tradition, a stand was made. The Frankish host of horse and foot gathered on the *lido* of Albiola, waiting for their fleet to force the *porto*, which was deep enough to allow of the passage of the transports. Opposite, on the *lido* of Pelestrina, stood the Venetians near their boats, which were armoured with ramparts of sails, cordages, and masts, behind which their archers did much execution. For nigh six months the desperate fight was waged. "Ye are my subjects," cried Pepin, "since from my lands ye come." The Venetians answered, "We will be subject to the Emperor¹ of the Romans, not to thee." Malamocco was at length captured, but was found to be deserted. Rough rafts and pontoons were constructed to thread the maze of shallow channels that led to Rivoalto, but the light, waspish boats of the Venetians drove them on to the shoals by the canal Orfano, where they were caught front and rear, and those who escaped suffocation in the water and the mud were quickly cut down by their enemies. The summer heats came; the arrows of the sun, more deadly than Venetian arms, wrought havoc among the Franks, whose forces wasted away, and the Carovingians were baffled. A Greek fleet threatening his rear, forced Pepin to come to terms. He promised to withdraw, to restore the captured territory, and to reaffirm all the ancient trading rights and privileges in his dominions in return for an annual payment. The Venetians emerged from the struggle a victorious and a united people centred at Rialto, and the State of Venice was now firmly rooted in the lagoons.

¹ The Greek Emperor at Constantinople.