



FACING THE PIAZZETTA.

The lightness of the heavens, the even purity of the air, the steely shine of the lagoon, the roseate reflections of the walls, the nights as clear as day, the softness of the Venetian dialect, the trustfulness and placability of the people, their tolerance for all men's humors, and their gentle intercourse,—out of all these results that unseizable and seductive quality which is indeed Venice, which sings at a man's heart, and so possesses and subdues him that he shall feel far from home whenever he is far from the Piazzetta.

Travel where you will, neither Rome nor Jerusalem, neither Granada, Toledo, nor the Golden Horn will offer you the spectacle of such another enchanted approach. It is a dream that has taken shape; a vision of fairyland turned into reality by human hands. The order of nature is suspended; the lagoon is like the heavens, the heavens are like the sea; these rosy islets carrying

temples are like barks sailing in the sky; and away upon the horizon, towards Malamocco, the clouds and the green islands lie mingled as bafflingly as shapes in the mirage of the desert. The very buildings have an air of dreamland; solids hang suspended over voids: and ponderous halls and palaces stand paradoxically supported on the stone lace-work of mediaeval sculptors. All the principles of art are violated; and out of their violation springs a new art, borrowed from the East, but stamped with the mark of Venice.

Opulent and untamed imaginations have spoiled the treasury of the Magnificoes to build these sculptured palaces and basilicas of marble and mosaic, to lay their pavements with precious stones and cover their walls with gold and onyx and oriental alabaster. They used the pillage of Aquileia, Altinum, Damascus, and Heliopolis. With a nameless daring they raised high in air, over their