

The Soul that Endures

yards overheard, what rich vesture has not swept through them, what noble thoughts and high hopes have not confided in their silence? And on the dirty steps where the children sit and play and throw their refuse into the water, what carpets have not been spread, what proud feet have not pressed to pass into the gondola and join the triumphant processional of Venice in her prime?

But what of ancient Venice? We sometimes despair of re-creating her. We ponder on Rialto, we watch her lights from the lagoons, we go in and out among her calli, peering into door and courtyard, climbing an outer stair, penetrating the recesses of sotto-portico or cellar; and many records we find of the life which once she lived, but all belong to the Venice of that second age, when she was already an established city. We cannot depopulate her and see again that company of islands gathered together in the lagoon, of various shapes and sizes, some covered with wood and undergrowth, others rising with bare backs from the water, with large and lonely outposts lying at greater distance here and there. Yet now and again come days when the spirit even of this remoter period returns to its well-nigh forgotten grave, the days when Venice lies under the rule of the rain-clouds. The inner waterways of the city lie dead like opaque marble under the dancing drops; but down the ways that lead from the lagoons the wind pours strong and restless from the sea, beating the water against the walls and into the damp vaults, a challenge from the sea to the city, from the sea unbridled and insurgent—yet not insurgent, for it has never submitted to her sway. Within Venice, along the slippery streets, there is gloom and desolation; the sun is the only visitor to whom her heart stands ever open; she would shut her gates if she could to these wild beings of cloud and wind, these houseless, grey pilgrims that, at no bidding of hers, come and claim lodging with her as they