

population was divided into two classes, viz.: the nobility, and the common people. These classes, so far as national rights were concerned, formed again separate orders, consisting of (a) the natives of the city of Venice, (b) those of the laguna islands, or Duchy, and (c) the natives of the annexed towns and provinces.

At first, noblemen alone were citizens; but the term must be taken in the sense of a full citizenship, for we find even in those remote times citizens *de jure*, who, although plebeians, enjoyed civic rights of a patrician character. The only condition imposed on each was that of being a legitimate child born in Venice, whose father was himself the son of a citizen who had never obtained his living by manual labour.¹

Those classes of Venetians, however, did not long retain their exclusive privileges, for in 1305 a law conferred the citizenship on every individual born in lawful wedlock, who had been a resident of Venice for twenty-five consecutive years.²

In 1348, when the plague had swept off a very large portion of the population, every foreigner who was married and had resided in the city with his family for two years, acquired the right to be made a citizen.³ This extreme liberality caused strangers to flock into Venice from every quarter, and the number of applicants became so great that the Government, fearing lest the old inhabitants should be overwhelmed by this influx, passed a law extending the period of domicile to fifteen years.⁴

On the 7th of May 1391, for reasons which we have been unable to ascertain, but which may be ascribed to a diminution of the population in conse-

¹ Marco FERRO, *Dizionario del Diritto Comune e Veneto*, Venezia, 1779, 4to, vol. iii, p. 189.

² SANDI, vol. ii, p. 814.

³ SANDI, *op. cit.*, lib. iv, cap. 5,

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 815.