

HORSES OF ST. MARK ARE BACK IN VENICE

Priceless Bronze Group Was
Sent to Rome for Safety—
Welcomed by People.

The Horses of St. Mark are back in their old place. Removed for fear of destruction by Austrian bombs, on May 27, 1918, to Rome, the priceless group of the four bronze horses was carried back to Venice in a veritable procession of triumph on November 12 last and replaced, amid the enthusiastic ovations of the Venetian people, on its old pedestal just above the portal of the Basilica of San Marco. The ceremony was described as "the greatest event in Venice since the beginning of the war."

So the peregrinations of the famous horses have come to an end for the present, at any rate. For these horses seem to display a strange wanderlust—an inclination to change their habitat every few centuries or so. They have been described as the oldest and, at the same time, the most traveled animals in the world.

How old are they? Nobody knows for certain. Their story reaches back into some uncharted tracts of Greco-Roman antiquity. Legends and hypotheses concerning their origin there are plenty; certainly there is not.

A diagram showing their wanderings in the course of the ages would, in a way, trace the progress of European civilization. Modeled by some Hellenic sculptor—one version attributes them to Lysippus, one of the greatest of the great—the team may have been originally hitched to the golden chariot bearing the statue of a winner in the great Olympic games. Tradition follows the group to imperial Rome, where it may have adorned the triumphal arch of a victorious Caesar—Nero, perhaps.

The next stage in the career of the four bronze horses finds them in the Hippodrome of Constantinople, where they had been transplanted by Con-

stantine the Great on the transfer of the imperial capital to Byzantium. There they survived, for eight centuries, alike the ravages of plunder-mad barbarians and the religious fury of iconoclasts—survived even the decree of Theodosius ordering the destruction of all pagan monuments and symbols.

Napoleon's Loot.

In the beginning of the thirteenth century they were carried by the victorious Latin conquerors of Constantinople to Venice, where they remained until 1797. In that year Napoleon included them in his copious Italian loot sent back to Paris. Eighteen years afterward they were restored to Venice, there to stay unmolested for exactly 100 years. Between May, 1915, and November, 1918, once again, after a lapse of 1400 years, their abode was Rome; and now they are back in the place, which, after all, can be considered as their proper home—the city of St. Mark, Venice.

From Classic Hellas to Rome, thence to Byzantium, Venice, Paris—the line of travel described by the four bronze horses symbolizes, in a sense, the shifting of the European centre of gravity, political and cultural. Their flight westward during the war before the ravages of the Teuton is, perhaps, equally symbolic; and their replacement heralds that once more Latin civilization is safe from the wrath of northern barbarians.

However, as regards the earliest history of the group, scholarly opinion is still unsettled. That it had been brought to Venice from Constantinople in the course of the so-called Latin crusade early in the 1200s seems assured; but nothing certain is known about its previous history. As a matter of fact, its first authentic mention occurs in A. D. 1384. On June 4 of that year, Petrarch, the poet, standing on the right of the Doge of Venice, on a platform overlooking the piazza of St. Mark, watched the triumphant procession commemorating the great Venetian victory over the rebellious Cretans. Describing the event, the poet mentions, "among those presents," as it were, the "wonderful gilt horses of St. Mark," so lifelike that they "almost neighed and stamped with their feet."

According to Venetian tradition which has an inherent probability, the four horses were brought to the City of the Lagoons from Constantinople by the Duke Enrico Dandolo in the year 1204, with other notable treasures cap-

tured on the conquest of the Eastern capital by the Latin crusaders. For the next twenty-five years, however, the horses seem to have been forgotten; in 1229 the Duke Pietro Ziani placed them above the portals of St. Mark's Basilica.

The early hypothesis that the horses were of Roman origin is assailed by A. Dall'Acqua Giusti, the Italian historian. He attributes this tradition to the ignorance of Venetian chroniclers, who associated the horses with the triumphal arch of some Roman emperor, probably Nero. Dall'Acqua Giusti points out that the quadriga, or triumphal chariot drawn by four horses, was by no means a Roman invention, but had been copied from a Greek model. It is actually identical with the vehicle of the winner in the Olympic chariot races held every five years. According to the testimony of antique coins, such statues of a team of four horses had existed in various places in ancient Greece. Thus, Pliney speaks of one, executed by Lysippus and standing in the Isle of Rhodes. Papias, the Byzantine historian, mentions another group of four bronze horses brought from Chios to Constantinople by the Emperor Theodosius, who reigned in the years 378-395. It is likely that the Horses of St. Mark are actually identical with the latter group, in which the theory of Roman origin and the transfer to Byzantium by Constantine the Great may be discarded. The story quoted by Sanudo, the Venetian writer, that the horses hail from Persia is, of course, a pure myth.

Symbol of the Republic.

Ever since their arrival to Venice the horses have been regarded as symbolic of the destiny of St. Mark's Republic. Thus in the year 1378, when Venice was besieged from the land side by the Paduans and from the sea by the Genoese, the leader of the latter, Pietro Doria, said to a Venetian envoy asking for a truce:

"Upon my honor, you shall not have peace until we have bridled those unbridled horses of yours that stand on the palace of your evangelist, St. Mark."

Notwithstanding the threat of the Genoese admiral, the horses of St. Mark remained unbridled for another four centuries; but, strangely, the prophecy implied in Doria's words came true in 1797. In that year the ancient Venetian Republic was destroyed by Napoleon, then First Consul of France; and the event was marked by the "bridling," as



Frank Moran, Pittsburg fireman, who announced his retirement from the ring. His battle with Fred Fulton dispelled any hopes he had of becoming a champion and he does not want to be a second-rater.

it were, of the four bronze horses, which were taken by the conqueror and carried away to his distant capital. On conquering the city, Napoleon demanded, among other things, the cession of twenty paintings, mostly by Titian and Veronese, adorning the ducal palace and the churches of Venice. The city coun-

cil, however, petitioned him to content himself with sixteen paintings and offered to substitute for the other four pictures the four horses of St. Mark. The latter, it was said, will "be in Paris a monument worthy of the achievements of these days, so famous in the annals of the world."

Napoleon accepted the compromise, and the horses were taken. Napoleon planned to hitch the four bronze horses in front of a quadriga which was to hold his own statue, crowned with a wreath of laurel, after the manner of the Roman Caesars. In 1805 the team was actually placed upon triumphal arch erected in front of the imperial residence in Paris. A distich on the side of the arch, commemorating the procession of 1798, said, referring to the horses:

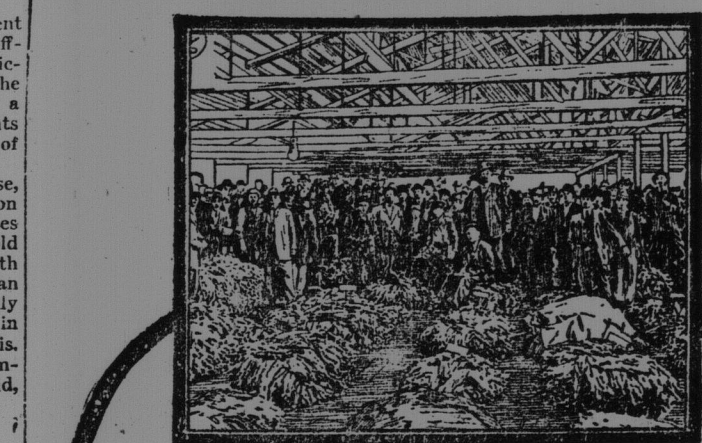
"Greece ceded them,
Rome has lost them.
Their fate changed twice,
It will change no more."

This prophecy was not fulfilled. In 1815, after the fall of Napoleon, the horses were removed from their Paris location at the order of Emperor Francis of Austria and carried back to Venice, which then formed the most highly prized gem among the Hapsburg possessions. It is a strange irony of fate that the same Austrians should have restored the Horses of St. Mark to their ancient home, whose barbarian methods of warfare necessitated, just one hundred years later, the removal of the priceless statues to the comparative safety of Rome.

During the late war, when raids of the Austro-Germanic airmen menaced the art treasures of Venice, the horses were first covered up with sandbags, like the rest of the public monuments. However, it was thought that the great weight of the group might, in case of an explosion, imperil the facade of St. Mark's itself, and so the horses were hoisted down and taken to Rome, where they found accommodation in the Baths of Diocletian. There they remained until last November—Eugene S. Bagger in New York Tribune.

BELFAST ELECTIONS.

Belfast, Jan. 18.—Up to January 15 the Belfast Corporation consisted of fifty-two Unionists, and eight Nationalists but as a result of the elections which ended Saturday in which the Laborites, Devlinites and Sinn Feiners skillfully



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bunched voted, it has thirty-one Unionists, five Nationalists, five Sinn Feiners and thirteen Laborites. The politics of the last named party ranges from extreme socialist to labor unionist and

orange. The results of the elections generally were of a freak order.

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