

LETTER FROM REV. C. H. SPURGEON.

Apologetic—Visit to Venice—Her Past and Present—Hotel de la Ville—The Gondola or the Omnibus Vehicle—Traversing the Streets—The Austrians and Venetians—Fete of Redemption—Church of St. Mark—The Future of Venice—May her deliverance Come—The Lord an Avenger of Wrong.

TO THE EDITORS OF CHRISTIAN WATCHMAN AND REFLECTOR :

DEAR SIR,—Permit me to get out of a scrape. My Baden letter has been printed in almost every journal in the English and American language. This is my fault. Let me confess and then vindicate. I am to blame for letting any one else copy my letter to you, and yet the censure must not be too severe. It seemed to me that the interview at Baden was of such political importance that a fair account of it ought to be given. My spirit was raised when I read the infamous inventions of some of the journals about cordial receptions, enthusiastic cheering, general illuminations, &c., &c. Well, thought I, I will just shed a little light upon this matter, and let my truthful story float abroad a little before its time. I sent a copy to the *British Standard*, and away it went into the *Times*, *Advertiser*, and everywhere else. I borrowed your lantern for a moment, and it was at once snatched at by very many fellows, who passed it from hand to hand until no man knew that it was the *Watchman's* lantern, which, with its bright *Reflector*, had pierced the darkness. Hereby I restore you the much damaged article, and henceforth you shall not find me taking it out of your hand either to enlighten a friend or detect a foe.

I have dreamed in Venice. My visit to that city in the sea has appeared more like a vision than a reality. Nothing has ever caused me such emotion. Venice is peerless, she sits as a queen upon the waters, and her many streams adorn her as with chains of silver. What must she have been in her glory, when her palaces of marble were crowned with beauty and overflowing with riches, when argosies, loaded with gems and spices, and all manner of precious things, floated along her canals, and her flag waved over three of the fairest provinces under heaven. She is so lovely in the weeds of her widowhood that we can scarce imagine her surpassing beauty when she sat in her glory, and her children were round about her. Crumbling to decay so fast, that the Venice of twenty years to come will be but the shadow of the Venice of to-day, she is, notwithstanding, so full of a bewitching beauty that the sea may still rejoice in its bride. Bound with fetters of iron, and heavily oppressed by the hand of the tyrant, her captivity cannot rend from her fair countenance her veil of deepest blue, the marriage gift of her ocean spouse, nor can the despot rob her of that illustrious history which has elevated her to the rank of an imperial city.

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To lay aside all romantic writing, and speak plainly, I feel that next to the cities of the Holy Land, Venice has the greatest charm for me. We stayed in the Hotel de la Ville, which was anciently a noble palace, and retains the impress of the olden time. It was very strange to walk down the steps and enter the black gondola, to be rowed so gently along the watery streets. One needs no legs here. Walking is intolerable, because of the narrow passages, or rather arches, through which you must wend your way, in the midst of dirt and noisome smells. None but mad people would dream of perambulating a series of filthy tunnels when the open channel is available at every turn. A gondola for the whole day, with one rower, costs a mere trifle, and for the poorer traveller there is the omnibus, which will carry him a very long distance for a few pence. Let him not, however, look for a box-seat with the driver, or hope to take his turn at the reins, for the omnibus is a large, covered boat, and is, in fact, only a prize-fed gondola. I think I have been rowed along almost every stream in Venice, broad and narrow, and in every one there is something of interest. True, the floating rottenness, the frequent odors, the numerous sewers, the loathsome insects on the walls, and above all, the Austrian soldiery, all assist in destroying every-fine-spun sentiment, but if all the nuisances were increased ten-fold, until every stream became an Acheron, I think I could brave the horror for the sake of the real interest and beauty which reward you at every pull of the oar. I mentioned the Austrian soldiers in conjunction with other disgusting objects, and I feel I ought to apologize for having flattered them too highly, for they are the real blight and curse of this lovely city. Never did I see more intense hatred between two races of men than between the Venetians and these German-intruders. A deep silence must be maintained, for words are treason, and a conversation of five persons in the street may be construed into conspiracy, but the inhabitants have other means of showing forth their feelings. I never saw an officer of the Austrian army in company with a civilian of Venice; however high their position, they are shut out from all society, and are made to feel that their presence is detestable. For months, the square of St. Mark, where the gentry have been in the habit of spending the evening under their clear Italian sky, has been deserted of all the upper classes, who would sooner be solitary prisoners than live in splendor in the company of the myrmidons of tyrants. I was present at the fete of Redemption, which last year was celebrated by the illumination of 3000 gondolas, and the presence of the great mass of the population, but on this occasion there were scarcely a hundred boats, and the people present were the scum of the populace. Ask any man in Venice the reason for the falling off, and if he is far enough from a brick wall to be away from spies and eaves-dropper, he will mutter something ugly about Austrians, and smile at the name of Victor Emmanuel and Garibaldi.

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The Sunday before I visited this place, the church of St. Mark was the scene of an ebullition of public opinion which is not to be mistaken. A foolish priest in his sermon went out of his way to abuse Garibaldi and the Sardinians he was at once assailed with notes of disapprobation; and upon his persisting, a riot ensued. One individual addressed the crowd, who were full of rage, and ripe for any deed of violence. Soon the police arrived, and I think my memory does not fail me when I say that there were more than sixty in prison as the result of that day's uproar. Wherever there was any special service in the churches, or a fete or a musical celebration, the most prominent persons were the military police with fixed bayonets. Never was foreign occupation more distinctly visible and more thoroughly abhorred. Disappointed of her fondest hopes by the unhallowed policy of Villafranca, Venice finds her chain more uneasy, and her fetters more heavy, because she fondly expected to be rid of them forever. I tremble at the inevitable bloodshed, should the smouldering enmity burst forth into rebellion. Exasperated by the chilling contempt of their victims, the Austrians would have no disposition to leniency, while on the other side no quarter would be rendered or accepted. The lion of St. Mark will look down upon a terrible struggle, unless the battle shall be fought in another place, and the despotism of Austria should tremble at another Solferrino; then may the banner of the free rejoice over the peaceful departure of the oppressor. May Garibaldi live and conquer, and may poor enslaved Venetia hear his glorious voice in her streets. Many are the hearts that cherish his name, and there are not a few who bear upon their persons the colors of liberty, which will see the sunlight the moment that his feet is planted on their soils.

You will think I am growing very political, but, indeed, it is enough to make any man speak out, when he sees before his eyes a great people groaning under a foreign bondage. I believe that what is wrong in politics is wrong in morals, and what is sinful in morals deserves the protest of religion. I believe that it is a mischievous spirit which would prevent the minister of Christ from uttering a rebuke against imperial iniquity. Our commission extends to princes as well as to peasants, and as we would not spare the sins of the poor, we certainly must not overlook the crying iniquity and oppression of the great. The Lord will avenge the wrongs of the poor, and his ministers must make known their condemnation of all oppression. Manhood and ministry would dishonor us if we were silent. My daily prayer is for the freedom of slaves of all colors and of all lands.

More of Venice in a future letter. I have one already commenced, and hope to improve as a correspondent.

I am, yours very truly,

Clapham, 1860.

C. H. SPURGEON.