

THE STONES OF VENICE

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTERS AND LOCAL INDICES
(PRINTED SEPARATLY)
FOR THE USE OF TRAVELLER
WHILE STAYING IN

VENICE AND YERONA

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PREFACE

This volume is the first of a series designed by the Author with the purpose of placing in the hands of the public, in more serviceable form, those portions of his earlier works which he thinks deserving of a permanent place in the system of his general teaching. They were at first intended to be accompanied by photographic reductions of the principal plates in the larger volumes; but this design has been modified by the Author's increasing desire to gather his past and present writings into a consistent body, illustrated by one series of plates, purchaseable in separate parts, and numbered consecutively. The note at page 147 in this volume, (lying by during my illness,) referred to the smaller photographs at that time in preparation: but the extension of the plan will render all directions to the binder unnecessary, except such as the possessor of the book may himself issue. Of other prefatory matter, once intended, — apologetic mostly, — the reader shall be spared the cumber: and a clear prospectus issued by the publisher of the new series of plates, as soon as they are in a state of forwardness. The second volume of this edition will contain the most useful matter out of the third volume of the old one, closed by its topical index, abridged and corrected.

BRANTWOOD,
3rd May, 1879.

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CHAPTER I. [FIRST, OF THE OLD EDITION.] THE QUARRY.

§1. Since first the dominion of men was asserted over the ocean, three thrones, of mark beyond all others, have been set upon its sands: the thrones of Tyre, Venice, and England. Of the First of these great powers only the memory remains; of the Second, the ruin; the Third, which inherits their greatness, if it forget their example, may be led, through prouder eminence, to less pitied destruction.

The exaltation, the sin, and the punishment of Tyre have been recorded for us, in perhaps the most touching words ever uttered by the Prophets of Israel against the cities of the stranger. But we read them as a lovely song; and close our ears to the sternness of their warning: for the very depth of the fall of Tyre has blinded us to its reality, and we forget, as we watch the bleaching of the rocks between the sunshine and the sea, that they were once "as in Eden, the garden of God."

Her successor, like her in perfection of beauty, though less in endurance of dominion, is still left for our beholding in the final period of her decline: a ghost upon the sands of the sea, so weak, — so quiet, — so bereft of all but her loveliness, that we might well doubt, as we watched her faint reflection in the mirage of the lagoon, which was the City, and which the Shadow. I would endeavour to trace the lines of this image before it be for ever lost; and to record, as far as I may, the warning which seems to me to be uttered by every one of the fast-gaining waves, that beat, like passing bells, against the Stones of Venice.

§II. It would be difficult to overrate the value of the lessons which might be derived from a faithful study of the history of this strange and mighty city: a history which, in spite of the labour of countless chroniclers, remains in vague and disputable outline, — barred with brightness and shade, like the far-away edge of her own ocean, where the surf and the

sandbank are mingled with the sky. The inquiries in which we have to engage will hardly render this outline clearer, but their results will in some degree alter its aspect; and, so far as they bear upon it at all, they possess an interest of a far higher kind than that usually belonging to architectural investigations. I may, perhaps, in the outset, and in few words, enable the general reader to form a clearer idea of the importance of every existing expression of Venetian character through Venetian art, and of the breadth of interest which the true history of Venice embraces, than he is likely to have gleaned from the current fables of her mystery, or magnificence.

§III. Venice is usually conceived as an oligarchy : She was so during a period less than the half of her existence, and that including the days of her decline; and it is one of the first questions needing severe examination, whether that decline was owing in any wise to the change in the form of her government, or altogether, as assuredly in great part, to changes in the character of the persons of whom it was composed.

The state of Venice existed Thirteen Hundred and Seventy-six years, from the first establishment of a consular¹ government on the island of the Rialto, to the moment when the General-in-chief of the French army of Italy pronounced the Venetian republic a thing of the past. Of this period, Two Hundred and Seventy-six years were passed in a nominal subjection to the cities of old Venetia, especially to Padua and in an agitated form of democracy of which the executive appears to have been entrusted to tribunes, chosen, one by the inhabitants of each of the² principal islands. For six hundred years, during which the power of Venice was continually on the increase, her government was an elective monarchy, her King or Doge possessing, in early times at least, as much

¹[I affectedly called it ' consular,' because the Ducal power was limited by the great council of the people, and often by two subordinate ministers. But see the clearer statement in my re-written history : " St. Mark's Rest," chap. v.]

²[There is no 'appearance' in the matter. Each tribe or group of people had its own natural captain, and I don't trace any subjection to the land cities, now . — See again the new history. Rut the main truth of the statement remains : the government was at first democratic, — agitated, and weak.]