

late last night, you were busy with your needle long after I lay asleep."

The girl's face brightened. "I am young and strong," she cried, rising suddenly, "and I like to work for you."

She touched the wan cheek with her soft lips, and laughed.

"That is my Nellie come back again," cried Mrs. Hill.

Her daughter averted her head, and brushed away a few tears surreptitiously.

"You are yourself now, child."

The girl tried to muster up another smile, but to no effect. The looking-glass on the wall was too much for her. "Such a horrid dowdy!" she cried, "did you ever?"

Just at that moment she heard a step upon the stairs, and John Collard entered. He was very smart, there was no denying that, and a fine fellow into the bargain. He wore a new grey suit, his boots were polished, a red tie set off the darkness of his beard, his face glowed with health and happiness. Beside him Nellie Hill was but a pale blossom; in her own opinion no blossom at all, only a worthless weed fit to be left to fade in a by-path of life's highway. Yet he folded her in his arms, and kissed her over and over again, as a man should who has travelled many miles for that particular purpose.

"We'll go to the park," he said, "and I reckon we shall find plenty to talk about; I see you are ready, lass."

"I'd liefer stay here with you, John."

"Fiddle-de-dee! You need air and exercise to bring the colour to your cheeks."

He tucked her arm through his, and they sallied out together. It was so pleasant to be

with him, so delightful to lean upon him and look up into his strong face, that Nellie's heart beat more quickly, and, though she was unaware of it, a faint flush crept into her cheeks. Her regrets, her shame, her sense of unutterable dowdiness slipped from her only to return with greater power when she saw other girls flaunting in their finery.

"Fine young woman, that!" said he from time to time; or, "Hasn't she got a smart gown? that's the colour I like, sets off the complexion beautiful."

Alas! poor Nellie. She had not the heart to look, though she strove hard not to be jealous. Presently, when tired of walking, they sank into a convenient seat, and a long silence fell upon them.

Nellie glanced furtively at her lover, his eyes were fixed on the passers-by, his expression was very grave.

"He is comparing me with those other girls," said she, and her eyes drooped. "In a moment he will tell me," she reflected; "in a moment he will say that he can have no more to do with a dowdy like me."

A lump came in her throat, it was all she could do to answer his chance remarks in monosyllabic fashion. Presently she felt his hand laid upon her arm, his eyes travelled upwards from her shabby dress to her face, which was white again now, and drawn with anxiety. It was coming at last, she set her lips firm and strove to meet his steadfast glance.

"Lass!" cried he. "I want to speak to you."

"Yes, John." Her voice was almost inaudible.

"It seems to me, Nellie, I must be an awful

simpleton. I never rightly knew that you was such a pretty girl until to-day."

"To-day!" Her eyebrows were uplifted in sheer amazement.

"Yes, love, and I wouldn't have known it now if the sun hadn't shone so; it glanced on your hair, and showed me there was gold in it, and I looked again and saw how blue your eyes were. I hadn't seen that rightly before. What a simpleton I must have been!"

"Oh, John!" Nellie Hill almost gasped for breath.

"And that gown of yours, I like it a deal better than a jim-crow affair like yonder girl has on her back."

He pointed to a young woman, whose attire Nellie had envied a moment since.

"Oh, John!" she cried again.

He held her hand in his, the glove that encased it was carefully darned.

After this they had tea together, and both had excellent appetites.

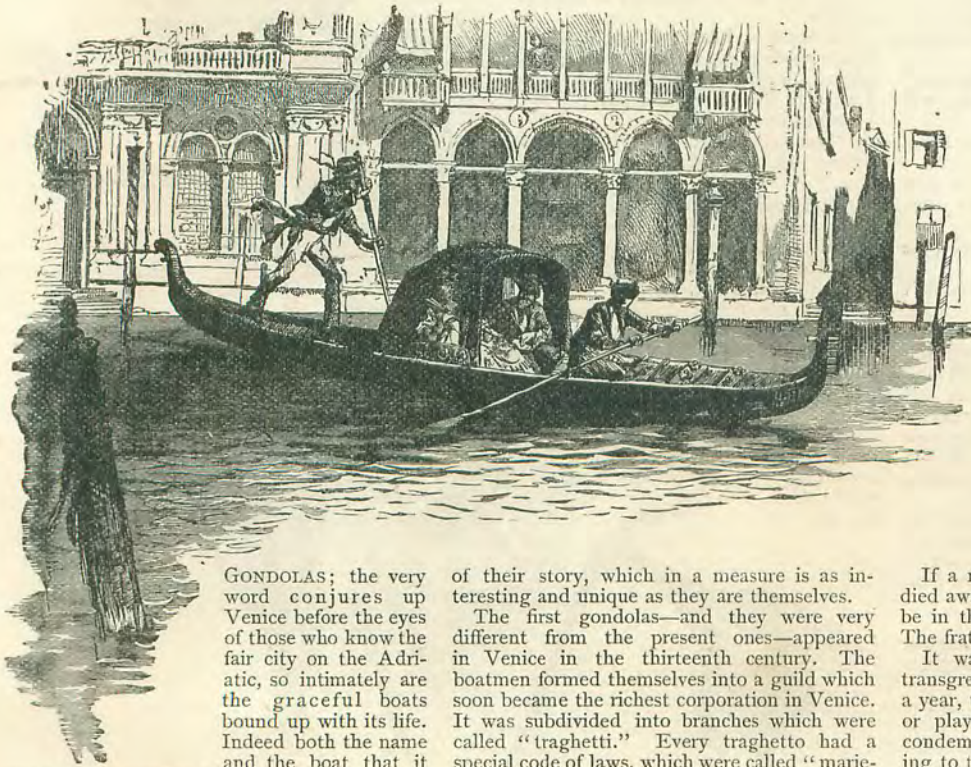
Nellie's mother was in bed when the girl returned that night. She knelt down and took the work-worn hand in hers.

"Oh, mother!" she said, "I was afraid of the beautiful sunshine, God forgive me! And it showed John the gold in my hair, not my shabby gown or my threadbare jacket. God knows when to send the sunshine, just as he knows when the rain should fall. John and I are to be married in the autumn, and he says you must bide with us. Oh, mother, I won't ever grumble again."

The two women kissed one another, as though in ratification of a solemn compact, and Nellie Hill hung up the shabby brown gown with something akin to reverence.

GONDOLAS.

By HELEN ZIMMERN.



stands for, is peculiar to the place, and familiar to the eyes, whether from actual memory or from illustrations. Little is known as a rule

of their story, which in a measure is as interesting and unique as they are themselves.

The first gondolas—and they were very different from the present ones—appeared in Venice in the thirteenth century. The boatmen formed themselves into a guild which soon became the richest corporation in Venice. It was subdivided into branches which were called "traghetto." Every traghetto had a special code of laws, which were called "mariegola" and each had its own patron saint. In the Venetian State Archives, the oldest mariegola on record is that of Saint Sophia, written in

Gothic characters of the thirteenth century, and placed under the protection of S. Giovanni Battista. In the mariegola or code of laws we find recorded all the customs of the ancient gondoliers. These customs are a mixture of sacred and profane, from which peeps a sweet and gentle sincerity. For example, the brotherhood had a mass sung every Sunday and Monday in the month, in the church of Saint Sophia, and the parish priest with his acolytes were received as members.

Mutual assistance was invariably rendered, in fact if one of the members fell ill the gastaldo or head of the traghetto, visited him, and the others were obliged "to put their hands in their pockets to help him." If he died a pauper, the funeral was at the expense of the brotherhood, and his companions were obliged to follow the bier, carrying lighted candles in their hands, and had to say twenty-five Ave Marias for the repose of his soul.

If a member of the brotherhood fell ill, or died away from Venice, should any companion be in the place, he was obliged to help him. The fraternity afterwards paid the expenses.

It was not all play; woe to those who transgressed, or did not confess at least twice a year, to those who committed a mortal sin, or played a game of chance, the mariegola condemned them to different penances according to their offences, and sometimes even expelled them from the brotherhood. There were also honorary members, who without being boatmen, could be members of the fraternity

by paying a small tax and saying prayers for the dead members. Other punishments and other prizes are mentioned. The punishments are always severe, because discipline was the basis of these old mutual assistance societies.

In the three following centuries the statutes begin to be rather modified; at the end of the sixteenth century, the Cinque Savî (Five Sages), the purveyors of the municipality, and the Council of the Ten (Consiglio dei Dieci), decided to acquaint themselves with the arts of the boatmen, and for the public welfare imposed a special tariff on every fraternity, and woe to the boatmen who tried to cheat.

Like their gondolas, which were painted in bright colours, the boatmen were dressed in beautiful costumes; particularly those of the patrician houses. In Venice gondolas and boatmen took the place of the municipalities and horses of other districts. Guerzoni, in his work entitled, *Piazza di Tutte le Professioni del Mondo*, tells us that the boatmen of the fifteenth century were low, despicable people, capable of anything, but we think he took too cruel a view of them. The gondolas and gondoliers, as we know, inspired men like Goethe, Byron, George Sand, De Musset, Gautier, Horace Brown and many more.

In 1094, in the diploma of Vital Faliero, the word gondola is first mentioned, and in 1300 a boat twenty feet long, rowed with twelve oars, is thus called. Little by little it changed form, keeping only the head at the poop and prow, and being slight and elegant. The "felze," the place where the passengers sit, was open at first and then became closed. In the sixteenth century gondolas were beautifully decorated with velvets and silks, and the costumes of the rowers were picturesque and costly.

Nowadays, every thread of tradition is rapidly being lost, the Venetian mariégola have not been consulted since 1866, and the modern boatmen differ greatly from the ancient, if we except those of the patrician houses, who are privileged people. At present, *au fond*, the gondoliers are good sort of people, capable of yelling like creatures possessed by the evil one, but incapable of doing harm to any.

The wit of these boatmen is peculiarly pungent and cuts like a razor. A foreigner who arrived in Venice, wished to go to a friend's abode, but had forgotten his address. He got into a gondola and ordered the man to take him to St. Moses; when he got there it did not seem to him right, so after searching in vain, he went to St. Paul with the same result, then off he went to another of the various quarters of Venice, all named after some saint. After some hours, the boatman, looking at him, quizzingly said, "La vogna comi paron, la lassa far ami." ("Come with me, sir, I will manage for you.") He took him to "All Saints," where arrived, he said, laying down his oar, "Qua la liga tuti, la cor ca che." ("Here they all are, and you can find what you want.")

Amongst celebrated boatmen, true heroes of the oar, Venice records Toscani, Vendetta, Zanchi, Voltolina, Spagnoletto, and Tondo Satta. One sees them in pictures, and hears of them in tales of poetry. Sometimes the boatmen rise yet higher, and become poets and literary men on their own account. Thus in the last century, one Antonio Bianchi is mentioned as the author of a poem in octavo rhyme, and in the present century, Antonio Maselico, who is still living, read, studied, and commented, the *Divina Commedia*. He afterwards travelled throughout Italy, holding conferences on his favourite poem. Antonio Maselico is no longer a boatman, but follows his studies as custodian in the Toscarini Lyceum.

Another Venetian custom, now dying out, or rather which is not celebrated with the pomp and solemnity of bygone years, is the regattas. These regattas, copied from the ancient Roman and Greek boat-races, were held by the fraternities of the boatmen, and soon impassioned the people. In 1300 is mentioned the first official regatta in Venice. Then the regatta was raced with galleys, and later on, this custom served as a spur for the training of the crews.

With the change of the times and the transformation of the gondola, the regatta became a matter of racing between the gondoliers in which one vied with another. This gave a sort of prestige to certain boatmen,

whose families preserve jealously all that once belonged to some famous ancestor, such as flags, prizes, poetry, manuscripts, etc. On solemn festivities all these things are exhibited on the façade of their houses, to remind their descendants of their glory.

The gondoliers who took part in the first regattas were not dressed in costume, they only wore a pair of thin, and very short trousers and a many-coloured handkerchief on their head. Later on they wore splendid costumes, and this splendour was reflected on those present, who filled the boats, which were decorated with velvet and silk.

The regattas were held in the Grand Canal, rendered magnificent by its superb patrician palaces, and its noble and majestic buildings. The balconies and windows were decorated with bright brocades, and the immense crowd grouped on the banks, on the bridges, and even on the roofs, increased the pageant.

The most celebrated regattas that took place in the Grand Canal, were those of 1574, 1686, 1688, 1709, 1740, 1764, 1767, 1783, 1791, 1807, 1825, 1838, and finally, that of the 28th of July, 1889, in which it was tried, but in vain, to revive the ancient splendour.

The gondolas in the regattas are served by two boatmen, one at the poop, and one at the prow; each boat has its own colours. They start from the Public Gardens and advance swiftly, close together, and in a straight line, as far as the stake round which they must go; then they return the same way, with the greatest velocity. The prizes are four in number, and consist of banners, which are kept by the families of the winners and of sums of money which they spend gaily. The last one to arrive has the characteristic and traditional live pig, as a reproach for having delayed in the race. When the regatta is finished, the line of boats is broken and the Grand Canal seems literally swarming, and echoes with lively song.

Whether of the past or the present, gondoliers are always characteristic people and different from all other boatmen. If they are not as splendid as they were, the fault is not theirs, but of the times, which have become hard in the old realm of the Adriatic.

