

VENICE



VENICE is the child of an unusual marriage, for her site was prepared and determined by two forces. The rivers of Venezia in their upper courses are swift and carry much silt. When they slow down in the plains some of their load is lost but much of it is carried out into the Adriatic so that the land continually encroaches on the sea. This is no slow process for the new land grows out at the rate of fifteen feet a year. Some of the silt is swept well out to sea and it is here that the second force comes in. At the head of the Adriatic a strong current runs from east to west and banks this last silt up in long banks known as *lidi*. Behind these banks are formed lagoons. The famous Venetian lagoon runs north from Chioggia for some thirty miles. The interior lagoon, the *Laguna Morta*, where the tide is hardly felt, tends to be malarious. But the *Laguna Viva*, in the midst of which lies Venice, is subject to the ebb and flow of the small Adriatic tide which rises and falls on an average some two feet or more, pouring into the lagoon through the various *porti* or breaks in the *lidi*. This tide both protects Venice from the worst ravages of malaria and acts as a cleansing agent to change the water of the great city. At the same time the *lidi* protect her from the fury of the sea. It is they that made it possible to build on sandbanks a foot or two above the water. So near is the water

that the crypt of St. Mark's is often flooded while the level of the Piazza of St. Mark has had to be raised several times so that now one goes down into the Church where once the citizens went up. This accounts too for the oddly stumpy appearance of the lower pillars of that airy Gothic fantasy, the Doge's Palace.

Venice is built upon no less than 117 islets and this explains the weird and whimsical courses of her streets and her canals which in general follow the windings of the original passages between these islets. The Giudecca Canal, which separates the city proper from the island of that name, where stands the great Church of the Redentore, was once the bed of the River Brenta. The Grand Canal marks where once a river wound from Mestre on the mainland. The other canals are always referred to in Venice as *rios*. Once there were many more, but the Austrians filled some of them up and made them into streets. A street so created is known as a *rio-terra*.

To most of us the charm of Venice lies in her canals, but actually the town is better visited on foot. The streets have many names and the explanation of these names is given in the glossary at the end of the booklet. You can go anywhere on foot and much of the charm of the city is