

their gondolas. Then they become the grandstand for the long pageant of the Venetian waterways.

These bridges are everywhere except over the Grand Canal. This is spanned only by three bridges, a wooden one of quite recent construction that leads to the Accademia delle Belle Arti, which lies in Dorsoduro, west of the Salute, the Rialto, which leads to the great fish and fruit markets and the station bridge, a graceful span of Istrian stone built in 1934, which leads to the Railway Station at the western end of the canal. If you wish to cross anywhere else you must seek the nearest *traghetto* of which there are eleven. These *traghetti* or ferries, are manned by gondoliers. They are easily recognised. You will see a group of boats lying at the foot of a set of wooden water steps, while at the top is a little shelter, always possessing a shrine for the patron saint of the *traghetto*. In or around the shelter cluster the gondoliers who will take you across for a fee fixed by the municipality, at present one lira—a fee that is doubled at night time. Like taxi drivers they take their passengers in rotation, for they form a close guild with strict rules in such matters, though most of their rights have been forfeited by their excessive and foolish behaviour in the past. The traditional method is to lay the crossing fee on the gunwale of the boat. When hiring a gondola for a longer journey you may either take it by the hour (all'ora) at so much for the first hour and thereafter by half-hours, or bargain for a particular trip. The first is the best if you are feeling in a lazy sightseeing mood, the second if you want to get somewhere swiftly. Whatever you agree on it will probably be claimed as scandalously insufficient when you come to pay at the journey's end. The dilapidated old gentleman who helps you to land, known as a *rampino*, is a gondolier past work and expects a lira or two for his probably unnecessary assistance. There is no escaping his demands.

The gondola itself is a boat designed for a purpose. It is not quite symmetrical but is built that way deliberately. The bow curves to one side to offset the thrust of the gondolier's single oar. The little awning or *felza* is invariably of black cloth. It was not always so funereal but so wastefully elaborate did the canopies become in the process of outshining one's neighbour that a law was passed forbidding any colour but black to be used. One word more. Unless the water is very rough do not be persuaded to take a second gondolier, it doubles the fare and is normally unnecessary.

With Venice as crowded as it is at present with soldiers of all nations the sight of four gondolas abreast, all packed with soldiers exchanging bilingual badinage, is not at all uncommon, while an occasional involuntary bath for the occupants from the wash of a passing motor-boat or *scaffo* adds to the general merriment. The amazing



Looking down a rio