



A History of the Venetian Republic

W. Carew Hazlitt

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The ancient Italian province of Venetia is of interest to us in the present inquiry as the source to which the first Venetians looked as the home of their fathers or of their own youth. It was a region of Northern Italy, which extended from the foot of the Alps to the Adriatic Sea; but its boundaries seem to have undergone changes. After its subjugation by the Romans, Venetia was considered as forming part of Cisalpine Gaul. The people are described as a commercial, rather than a warlike, community; and it is a curious circumstance that they displayed in their dress, like their insular descendants, a predilection for black. An immense amount of confusion has arisen in the accounts of this country and its inhabitants by a failure to discriminate with proper care between the Veneti of America and their Adriatic namesakes. The former were remarkable for their proficiency in martial pursuits and their brave resistance to the Roman legions and navy; yet it is at the same time questionable whether the trade in amber conducted by Greeks and Phoenicians between Western Europe and the Baltic does not really belong to the Transalpine Veneti, who are also more likely to be the people among whom Herodotus relates that it was a custom to sell their marriageable daughters by auction.

There seems to be some plausibility in the suggestion that a colony passing in the course of migration from their native soil to Asia Minor, proceeded thence, in process of time, to Northern Italy, on the shores of which they formed numerous settlements. These colonists were called Tyrrhenians or Etruscans; they became the founders, at successive periods, of Spina at the mouth of the Po, and Hadria or Hatria in its vicinity, both of which attained the highest degree of commercial prosperity. No vestiges of the former are now visible, though the name may seem to have survived in the islet of Spinalunga, a later alluvial formation. The gradual deposits of nature have had the effect of removing Hadria to a distance of more than fourteen miles from that sea on which it once stood, and which still bears its name—the Hadria iracunda of Horace. Nor has the decline been recent; for even in the time of the Romans these places presented little more than the shadow of their pristine greatness.

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