

The forty-second volume of Putnam's
"Story of the Nations" series is
given to Venice, and is written by

Mrs. Alethea Wiel. As the author modestly confesses in her preface, the complete and definitive account of Venetian history, whether in Italian or English, has yet to be produced. Meanwhile this work will serve presumably an honest purpose, as faithfully tracing the fortunes of that Republic, from her mysterious origin to the noble spectacle of her supremacy, and thence her moral degradation and final cession to Austria in 1798. A postscript of eight pages attempts to sketch the last century of her existence. The volume is furnished with a list of the Doges, a generous index, and numerous soft-toned prints of photographs and paintings. One misses here the style of a Symonds or an Oliphant; nay, he half suspects, after reading several chapters, that the authoress is an inveterate Freemanite, and thanks God she has "no style,"—which is tenfold the affront to opalescent, silver-tongued Venice it could be to Sicily, perhaps. It is very easy to mistake the materials of history for history itself, especially when one has access to the Venetian archives, so full of the most detailed narrative—"a hundred piping voices"; yet accuracy of investigation is a strongly redeeming virtue when there have been so many picturesque dabs into the story, never sacrificing it for the sake of truth. "An author," said

Lowell, "should consider how largely the art of writing consists in knowing what to leave in the ink-stand." Many of Mrs. Wiel's sentences are weighed down with a surplusage of nouns or adjectives at the cost of their effectiveness. At the very beginning of the first chapter, for instance, we are informed that "it may be well to consider for a moment the manner in which the dwellings and habitations which formed the town took shape and being, and also what measures were adopted to secure the ground whereon these homes and houses were about to be established." This rhetorical trick of using in pairs words of nearly the same meaning amounts to a mannerism with the writer, or it were endurable, like the occasional sight of Siamese twins. But "entirety and completeness," "exaction and demand," "advantage and gain," "marks and indications," "slaughter and carnage," "attic or garret," "haughty and overbearing"—in Mr. Bagehot's words relative to Demosthenes' use of pebbles, we cannot dwell on it; it is too much. The style of the historian of Venice need not be over-ornate, but it should be picturesque and accurate.