

The Brochure Series of Architectural Illustration, Volume 01, No. 01, January 1895 eBook

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Contents

The Brochure Series of Architectural Illustration, Volume 01, No. 01, January 1895 eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Page 1.....	3
Page 2.....	5
Page 3.....	7
Page 4.....	9
Page 5.....	10
Page 6.....	12
Page 7.....	14
Page 8.....	16
Page 9.....	17
Page 10.....	19

Page 1

LIST OF PLATES.

Venetian Palaces. i. Southwest Angle of the Ducal Palace. ii. Palazzo Contarini Fasan. iii. Palazzo Cavalli. iv. Window Tracery in the Palazzo Cavalli. v. Window Tracery in the Palazzo Cicogna. vi. Portion of the Facade of the Ca D'Oro. vii. Portion of the Facade of the Ca D'Oro. viii. Palazzo Pisani.

Byzantine-Romanesque Doorways, Apulia. ix. Principal Doorway to Cathedral, Trani. x. Principal Doorway to Cathedral, Trani. xi. Principal Doorway to Cathedral, Conversano. xii. Portion of Facade, Basilica at Altamura. xiii. Principal Doorway, Basilica at Altamura. xiv. Detail of Doorway, Basilica at Altamura. xv. Doorway of Madonna di Loreto, Trani. xvi. Entrance to Church of the Rosary, Terlizzi.

Cloister at Monreale, Sicily. xvii. Double Capital. xviii. Double Capital. xix. Double Capital. xx. One Side of Cloister.

Byzantine Capitals from Ravenna. xxi. Capital from the Apse of S. Vitale. xxii. Capital from S. Vitale. xxiii. Capital from S. Vitale. xxiv. Capital in the Museum of the Academy.

Byzantine-Romanesque Windows, Apulia. xxv. Window in S. Teresia, Trani. xxvi. Window in S. Teresia, Trani. xxvii. Window in the Basilica, Altamura. xxviii. Windows in S. Gregorio, Bari. xxvix. Triforiurn Window in S. Gregorio, Bari. xxx. Window in Apse of the Cathedral, Bari. xxxi. Window in Bittonto. xxxii. Window in Apse of the Cathedral, Bittonto.

Two Florentine Pavements. xxxiii. Portion of Pavement in the Baptistery. xxxiv. Portion of Pavement in the Baptistery. xxxv. Portion of Pavement in the Baptistery. xxxvi. Portion of Pavement in the Baptistery. xxxvii. Portion of Pavement in the Baptistery. xxxviii. Portion of Pavement in S. Miniato al Monte. xxxix. Portion of Pavement in S. Miniato al Monte. xl. Portion of Pavement in S. Miniato al Monte.

Renaissance Panels from Perugia. xli. Panel from Choir Stalls, S. Pietro. xlii. Panel from Choir Stalls, S. Pietro. xliii. Panel from Choir Stalls, S. Pietro. xliv. Panel from Choir Stalls, S. Pietro. xlv. Panel From Choir Stalls, S. Pietro. xlvi. Panel from Choir Stalls, S. Pietro. xlvii. Panel from Choir Stalls, S. Pietro. xviii. Panel from the Chamber of Commerce.

Italian Wrought Iron.

xlx. Lantern on Palazzo Strozzi, Florence.

Italian Wrought Iron. i. Lantern on Palazzo Guadagni, Florence. ii. Lantern on Palazzo Brocella, Lucca. iii. Lantern on Palazzo Baroni nel Fillungo, Lucca. liii. Torch-Bearer from Siena. liv. Torch-Bearer from Siena. liv. Torch-Bearer from Siena. lvi. Torch-Bearer from Siena.

Fragments of Greek Detail. Ivii. Capital from the Parthenon, Athens. Iviii. Capital from the Erechtheion, Athens. lix. Base from the Erechtheion, Athens, lx. Cap of Anta from the Erechtheion, Athens. lxi. Fragment found on the Acropolis, Athens. lxii. Capital from the Propylam, Athens. lxiii. Cyma from the Tholos, Epidauros. lxiv. Capital from the Tholos, Epidauros.

Page 2

Pulpits of Southern Italy. lxxv. Ambo in the Capella Palatina, Palermo. lxxvi. Ambo in the Cathedral, Salerno. lxxvii. Pulpit in the Cathedral, Salerno. lxxviii. Pulpit in the Cathedral, Ravello. lxxix. Ambo in the Cathedral, Ravello. lxxx. Pulpit in S. Giovanni, Ravello. lxxxi. Ambo in S. Lorenzo Fuori le Mura, Rome. lxxxi. Pulpit in the Cathedral, Messina.

French Farmhouses, Normandy. lxxxi. Ferme de Turpe. lxxiv. Ferme de Turpe. lxxv. Ferme de Turpe. lxxvi. Ferme de Turpe. lxxvii. Manoir d'Ango. lxxviii. Manoir d'Ango. lxxix. Manoir d'Ango. lxxx. Manoir d'Ango.

Country Houses of Normandy. lxxxi. Ferme la Vallauine. lxxxii. Manoir al Archelles. lxxxiii. Manoir at Archelles. lxxxiv. Porch of Church at Beuvreil. lxxxv. Manoir de Vitaval, Ste. Andresse. lxxxvi. Manoir d'Ango. lxxxvii. Manoir d'Ango. lxxxix. Manoir d'Ango.

English Country Houses. lxxxix. Old Houses, Hanover. xc. Middle House, Mayfield, Sussex xci. Old Hall, Worsley. xcii. Speke Hall. xciii. Speke Hall. xciv. Smithells. xcv. Saintesbury Hall. xcvi. Old Manor House, Lythe Hill. xcvii. Old Manor House, Lythe Hill. xcvi. Old Manor House, Lythe Hill. xcix. Old Farm House, Lythe Hill. c. Gate House, Stokesay Castle.

INDEX OF SUBJECTS.

Advice to Young Architects
Aitchison, Prof., Advice to Young Architects
Altamura, Basilica at,
Ango, Manoir d'
Apulia, Doorways from " Windows from
Architectural Education
Architectural Schools
Columbia College
Harvard University
Mass. Inst. of Technology
Ateliers in New York City
Athens, Erechtheion, Cap and Base from " Parthenon, Cap from " Propylaea "
Bari, Cathedral of, Window in " S. Gregorio, Window in
Beaux-Arts Architects, Society of
Bittonto, Cathedral, Window in " Window in
Boston Public Library, Decoration of
Building Exhibit
Byzantine-Romanesque Doorways
Byzantine-Romanesque Windows
Capitals, Monreale " Ravenna
Case, John W., Hints to Draughtsmen



Catalogues of Exhibitions
Clark Medal Competition
Cleveland Architectural Club
Cloister of Monreale
Club Notes
Architectural Club of Lehigh University
Architectural Club of San Francisco
Architectural League of New York
Art League, Milwaukee
Baltimore Architectural Club
Boston Architectural Club
Buffalo Chapter A.I.A.
Chicago Architectural Club
Cincinnati Architectural Club
Cleveland Architectural Sketch Club
Denver Architectural Sketch Club
Detroit Architectural Sketch Club
"P.D.'s"
Rochester Sketch Club
Sketch Club of New York
Society of Beaux-Arts Architects
St. Louis Architectural Club
St. Paul Architectural Sketch Club
T Square Club, Philadelphia
Columbia College
Competition for Advertising Design
Competitions, Awards in
Competitions, Brochure Series " " " No. 1, " "



Page 3

" No. 2, " " " No. 3,
Conversano, Doorway of Cathedral
Cosmaiti Work
Country Houses of Normandy
Country Houses, English
Doorways, Byzantine-Romanesque
Ecole des Beaux-Arts, diplomas
England.
Hanover, Old Houses
Lythe Hill
Mayfield, Sussex, Middle House
Saintesbury Hall
Smithells
Speke Hall
Stokesay Castle
Worsley, Old Hall
English Country Houses
Epidauros, Tholos, Cap and Fragment from
Farmhouses, French
Florence, Baptistery, Pavement from " Palazzo Guadagni, Lantern from " S. Miniato,
Pavement from " Strozzi Palace, Lantern from
Florentine Pavements
Gothic Palaces of Venice
Greek Detail, Fragments of
Harvard University
Hints to Draughtsmen
Italian Wrought Iron
Lanterns, Wrought Iron
Lucca, Palazzo Brocella, Lantern from " " Baroni " "
Mass. Institute of Technology
Messina, Cathedral, Pulpit
Monreale, The Cloister of
Mosaic Floors, Modern
Mosaic Work
Normandy, Ferme de Turpe " Ferme la Vallanine " Manoir at Archelles " Manoir d'Ango "
Manoir de Vitanval " Porch of Church at Beuvreil
Pavements, Two Florentine
Palermo, Capella Palatina, Pulpit in
"P.D.'s" The
Perugia, Chamber of Commerce, Panel from " Renaissance Panels from " S. Pietro,
Panels from
Personals



Piano Case, Competition for
Pulpits of Southern Italy
Ravello, Cathedral, Pulpit and Ambo in " S. Giovanni, Pulpit in
Ravenna
Museum of Acad. Bel. Arti, Cap from
S. Vitale, Caps from
Ravenna Capitals
Reproduction of Architect's Drawings
Roman Scholarship
Rome, American School of Architecture at
Rome, S. Lorenzo Fuori, Ambo in
Rotch, Arthur, Bequest of
Rotch Scholars, C.H. Blackall
Rotch Travelling Scholarship
Salerno, Cathedral, Ambo and Pulpit in
Siena, Wrought Iron Torch Bearers from
Terlizzi, Entrance to Church of the Rosary
Torch Bearers, Wrought Iron
Trade Notes
Trani, Doorway of Cathedral " " Madonna di Loreto
Turpe, Ferme de
Venetian Palaces
Venice
Ca D'oro
Ducal Palace
Palazzo Cavalli " " Window-tracery in
Palazzo Cicogna, Window-tracery in
Palazzo Contarini Fasan
Palazzo Pisani
Windows, Byzantine-Romanesque
Wood Floors
Wrought Iron, Italian

[Illustration: I. The Southwest Angle of the Ducal Palace, Venice.]

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No. I.

THE GOTHIC PALACES OF VENICE.

Page 4

The location of Venice upon a group of islands, sufficiently removed from the mainland to make it impossible to effectually attack it from this side, and naturally defended on the side towards the sea by a long chain of low islands, separated by shallow inlets and winding channels, making it difficult to approach, has rendered the city peculiarly free from the disturbing influences which were constantly at work in the neighboring cities of Italy during the Middle Ages. While her neighbors were building strong encircling walls, each individual house a fortress in itself, Venice rested secure in her natural defences and built her palaces open down to the water's edge, with no attempt at fortification. Her hardy and adventurous inhabitants rapidly extended their trade to all quarters of the world and accumulated vast wealth, which was freely lavished on public and private buildings. The magnificence of the former was only equalled in the days of ancient Rome, and it is doubtful if the latter have ever been surpassed in sumptuousness and splendor. The palaces of Venice form an architectural group of great interest, in many respects quite distinct from the contemporary buildings on the mainland. They were carefully planned to satisfy the demands for comfort and convenience as well as display. Most of them have the same arrangement of plan, and were commonly built of two lofty and two low stories. On the ground floor, or water level, is a hall running back from the gate to a bit of garden at the other side of the palace, and on either side of this hall, which was hung with the family trophies of the chase and war, are the porter's lodge and gondoliers' rooms. On the first and second stories are the family apartments, opening on either side from great halls, of the same extent as that below, but with loftier roofs, of heavy rafters gilded or painted. The fourth floor is of the same arrangement, but has a lower roof, and was devoted to the better class of servants. Of the two stories used by the family, the third is the loftier and airier, and was occupied in summer; the second was the winter apartment. On either hand the rooms open in suites. The courtyard at the rear usually had a well in its centre with an ornamental curb; and access to the upper floors of the house was gained by an exterior staircase in the court, which was often elaborately enriched with carved ornament.

The materials used in construction are mostly red and white marbles, used with a fine color sense, and the desire for abundance of color was frequently further gratified by painting the exterior walls with elaborate pictorial decorations.

[Illustration: II. The Palazzo Contarini Fasan, Venice.]

The earliest palaces are Byzantine, but with the growth of the Gothic movement these were gradually superseded, although the Gothic influence worked more slowly here than on the mainland. The richest and most elaborate work was built at this period. Finally the Renaissance took the place of Gothic; and the later palaces, built in this style, show strongly the debased condition into which the art of Venice fell in the Dark Ages.

Page 5

We have selected for the illustrations of this number of the *Brochure series* some of the most widely known examples of the fifteenth-century Gothic palaces, built at the time when Venice was at the zenith of prosperity as the principal commercial power of the world.

I.

Southwest angle of the ducal palace, Venice.

Although the Ducal Palace is much larger than the other palaces of Venice, and intended for general civic uses as well as a residence for the Duke or Doge, it follows closely the type already described. It has undergone so many changes since its first foundation in about the year 800 (813 according to Ruskin), having been destroyed five times, and as often re-erected in grander style, besides having been added to and the dilapidated portions restored, that it is impossible to assign a comprehensive date to cover the building of the present structure. In fact, the earliest portion was gradually added to, carrying it further and further around the quadrangle until it reached the point of beginning, when this process was repeated, partially replacing the older Byzantine work with Gothic and then with Renaissance, the present building still having examples of all three styles.

The portion shown in our illustration is said to have been erected between the years 1424 and 1442, by Giovanni Buon and his sons Pantaleone and Bartolommeo Buon the elder; although Mr. Ruskin states that in 1423 the Grand Council sat in the Great Council Chamber for the first time, and in that year the Gothic Ducal Palace of Venice was completed.

This angle, which faces the Piazzetta and the Riva, is called by Mr. Ruskin the "Fig-Tree Angle," because of the group of sculpture representing the fall of man. The figure above the angle capital of the upper arcade is that of Gabriel. The richly decorated capitals of the lower arcade represent personifications of the Virtues and Vices, the favorite subjects of decorative art, at this period, in all the cities of Italy. The capitals of the upper arcade, no two of which are alike, are also richly wrought with figure sculpture, the one on the angle containing representations of the four winds.

The arrangement of the tracery above the upper arcade is worthy of note as the placing of the quatrefoils between the arches, which is characteristic of earlier examples, is more reasonable, from a constructive point of view, than the later practice of placing them above the centres of the arches.

The use of the rope moulding as a decorative finish for the angle of a building is also characteristic of the palace architecture of Venice, and may here be seen most effectively applied.

II.

The Palazzo Contarini Fasan, Venice.

Page 6

This is one of the most notable examples of domestic Gothic architecture in Venice, and dates from the fifteenth century. Ruskin refers to it as follows: "In one respect, however, it deserves to be regarded with attention, as showing how much beauty and dignity may be bestowed on a very small and unimportant dwelling-house by Gothic sculpture. Foolish criticisms upon it have appeared in English accounts of foreign buildings, objecting to it on the ground of its being 'ill proportioned'; the simple fact being that there was no room in this part of the canal for a wider house, and that its builder made its rooms as comfortable as he could, and its windows and balconies of a convenient size for those who were to see through them and stand on them, and left the 'proportions' outside to take care of themselves, which, indeed, they have very sufficiently done; for though the house thus honestly confesses its diminutiveness, it is nevertheless one of the principal ornaments of the very noblest reach of the Grand Canal, and would be nearly as great a loss if it were destroyed, as the church of La Salute itself."

This building is popularly known as "Desdemona's House."

III.

The Palazzo Cavalli, Venice.

This palace, situated opposite the Academy of Arts on the Grand Canal, also dates from the fifteenth century. Its balconies and tracery are of the later Gothic period, showing marked tendencies towards the Renaissance.

It has been recently restored by its present owner, Baron Franchetti, and is frequently spoken of as the Palazzo Franchetti.

IV.

Window tracery in the Palazzo Cavalli.

In Venetian tracery it will always be found that a certain arrangement of quatrefoils and other figures has been planned as if it were to extend indefinitely into miles of arcade, and out of this colossal piece of marble lace a portion in the shape of a window is cut mercilessly and fearlessly: what fragments and odd shapes of interstice, remnants of this or that figure of the divided foliation, may occur at the edge of the window, it matters not; all are cut across and shut in by the great outer archivolt. This is of course open to serious criticism as construction, but its beauty and effectiveness, as used here, cannot be gainsaid.

V.

Window tracery in the Palazzo Cicogna, Venice.

This is an example of early Gothic work in Venice and is quite unlike later examples. Ruskin speaks of it as the only instance of good *complicated* tracery to be found in Venice. The fact that it is moulded only on the face is considered evidence of its early date.

In this view, as, in fact, in all of the examples which we have selected, the moulding formed of alternating blocks or dentils, projecting first on one side and then the other, which is peculiar to Venice, can be seen. It was commonly used as a frame about a window or group of windows, and is very effective, especially when used, as it frequently was, relieved against a flat wall surface.

Page 7

VI. and VII.

Two portions of the facade of the Ca D'oro, Venice.

This, next to the Ducal Palace, is the most elaborate and it might be said the most beautiful of the Gothic Venetian palaces. It has been considerably changed in the various restorations to which it has been subjected, but still has enough of its original features to remain a wonderfully beautiful building. It is an extreme example of the characteristic disregard of the ordinary principles of building construction to be found throughout the work we have been considering. Fergusson's remarks upon this failing of the Venetian architects is pointed and well considered. He says: "Most of the faults that strike us in the buildings of Venice arise from the defective knowledge which they betray of constructive principles. The Venetian architects had not been brought up in the hard school of practical experience, nor thoroughly grounded in construction, as the northern architects were by the necessities of the large buildings which they erected. On the contrary, they merely adopted details because they were pretty, and used them so as to be picturesque in domestic edifices where convenience was everything, and construction but a secondary consideration."

The Ca D'oro was probably built about the middle of the fourteenth century.

Evidences of the use of color in this facade can be plainly seen in the photographic views, and the contrast of the deep shadows and flat wall surfaces is strikingly beautiful.

VIII.

The Palazzo Pisani.

This palace is of the late Gothic period, nearly approaching the Renaissance. It is situated on the lower reach of the Grand Canal.

In all of the examples here selected a marked predominance of horizontal treatment will be observed. The roofs are flat, and arcades and balconies all help to emphasize the horizontal direction in the design. This, it will be observed, is distinctly different from the contemporary Gothic of the rest of Europe.

* * * * *

Notable examples of American buildings modelled after or in the style of the Venetian palaces are the Chicago Athletic Club, the Montauk Club, Brooklyn, and the new building adjoining the Hoffman House, Madison Square, New York.

[Illustration: IV. Window Tracery in the Palazz, Cavalli, Venice.]



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Page 8

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A well-selected collection of foreign photographs has come to be as necessary and invariable a feature in a well-equipped architect's office as good drawing instruments or as Vignola's treatise on the Roman Orders. But unfortunately a really satisfactory collection of photographs is seldom within the reach of more than a small proportion of the architects who could use them to advantage. This is partly on account of the expense of a good collection, as photographs can hardly be bought for less than twenty-five cents each, and partly on account of the difficulty of finding a desirable stock from which to make selections on this side of the Atlantic. Nearly all of the most valuable collections have been gathered together abroad by the owners and are the result of gradual accumulation, probably extending over years of travel, and representing no small investment of money.

Such a collection, it is needless to say, is not within the grasp of the young and struggling draughtsman, but he, of all others, would profit most by possession and use of such a treasure if it could be placed in his hands. It would help to form and direct his tastes, making him familiar with the masterpieces of the past, and would furnish a basis for comparison of the current work about him.

Of course a draughtsman in any of the larger offices will have certain opportunities to study and work from the collection in the office library. This is a valuable privilege, but it is only open to a few out of the many draughtsmen in the country, and is not to be compared in its resulting benefits to the actual possession of even a very much smaller collection.

* * * * *

It is the purpose of the *Brochure series* to place in the hands of draughtsmen a most carefully selected series of photographic reproductions, chosen both for their educational value and their usefulness as practical reference material for everyday work. This can be done at one fiftieth the cost of ordinary photographs, and thus be easily within the reach of any draughtsman.

No attempt will be made to follow any systematic arrangement of the subjects presented, although it will be frequently found advisable, as in the present issue, to group a number of subjects of more or less related character. The main result to be sought for is the presentation of the greatest amount of the most valuable material in the most available shape, and at the least cost. The possibility of realizing this ambitious purpose remains to be demonstrated. It need only be said that this initial number is put forward as an earnest of the work to follow.

* * * * *

Page 9

A most important feature in recent educational work as applied to architecture is to be found in the formation of a number of classes, or *ateliers* as they are called, modelled in the main after those in Paris. They are all formed with the purpose of furnishing instruction in those elements of academic design which are unattainable in the routine experience of office practice. The details of arrangement for accomplishing this purpose vary somewhat in the different *ateliers*. We believe the first to be started was the one connected with the office of Messrs. Carrere & Hastings in New York. Here a limited number of students, both young men and young women, are received, and as a return for the instruction given them are expected to render such assistance in the regular work of the draughting-room as they can. This service is exactly similar to the "niggering," as it is called, required by long-established custom of the younger men at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts at Paris, which is one of the most valuable features of the school work. In Paris by this method the younger students have an opportunity to come in personal and intimate contact with those more advanced, and have the benefit of working on larger and more important work than they are capable of undertaking unaided. In the new *atelier* a problem in design is given to the class, thus more than ordinarily equipped for the work before him.

[Illustration: VII. Portion of the Facade of the Ca D'oro, Venice.]

His work while abroad was systematic, well directed, and untiring, and no one of the succeeding scholars has labored to better advantage or accomplished more than he, although each in turn has had the example and experience of his predecessors as a guide and stimulus to increased endeavor. Mr. Blackall's time was devoted largely to travel, together with the sketching and measuring of important work.

Since his return he has built up a successful and varied practice.

As an active member of the Boston Society of Architects and the first president of the Boston Architectural Club, he has done much to advance the best interests of the profession, both within its ranks and in its relations to the public. To nothing so much as to his faithful labors can the success of the Architectural Club be laid. He has made it the largest and most effective organization of its kind in the country, and the draughtsmen of Boston have every reason to be thankful to him for his unselfish devotion to their interests.

He has, for several years, been the permanent chairman of the Committee of the Boston Society of Architects, appointed to administer the Rotch Scholarship, and through his earnest work the opportunities open to its holders are being constantly increased.

(To be continued.)

* * * * *



Club Notes.

Page 10

The youngest of the architectural societies of the country is the Cleveland Architectural Club. It was organized in November last with a membership of fifteen, which number has been rapidly growing and bids fair to grow much further. In this instance, as has been the case in all the other large cities where similar clubs have been formed, it is the better class of draughtsmen who have felt the need of an organization that would bring them together socially, and give an opportunity for organized study and mutual improvement; and it is a most encouraging symptom of the generally diseased condition of the public mind in relation to architecture that these clubs have become so numerous in the last few years. Aside from the direct influence upon its own membership, the manifestation of a progressive and aggressive spirit cannot help provoking curiosity and discussion outside, if it accomplishes nothing further. It is somewhat surprising that with the unusually active interest which Cleveland has always evinced in matters relating to art, such a movement has not been started before. We shall have occasion before long to refer more in detail to this new and flourishing society.

* * * * *

The Illinois Chapter of the American Institute of Architects announces the second annual competition for a gold medal, to be open to members of the Chicago Architectural Club who are not practising architects of over two years' standing. The problem is the design for a memorial building for the study of botany, zoology, and mineralogy, and is to be finished on April 29.

* * * * *

The Chicago Architectural Club mingles work and play in a thoroughly Bohemian fashion. A recent invitation card bid its members to attend a "Rip-Snorter at the Club House," stating that "provisions and provisos would be provided and Frou Frous be on tap." The exact significance of this cabalistic description is known only to the members and their guests. The same card announced that the new Constitution and By-Laws would be finally voted upon at the same meeting, and further announced the conditions of a forthcoming sketch competition. Things move rapidly in Chicago.

* * * * *

The Chicago Architectural Club will hold its eighth annual exhibition of works of architecture and the allied arts at the Art Institute for two weeks beginning May 23. For further particulars, address John Robert Dillon, secretary, 274 Michigan Avenue, Chicago.

* * * * *

The Buffalo Chapter of the A.I.A. will hold its second annual exhibition in the Art Gallery, Library Building, in connection with the exhibition of the Buffalo Society of Artists, from

March 18 to 30. For further particulars, address J.H. Marling, 15 Morgan Building, Buffalo.

[Illustration: VIII. The Palazzo Pisani, Venice.]