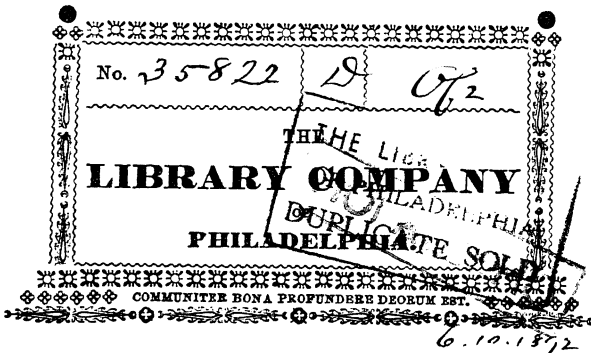


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THE VENETIANS

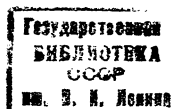
A Novel

BY

M. E. BRADDON

AUTHOR OF "AURORA FLOYD" "THE FATAL THREE"
"THE DAY WILL COME" ETC.





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CONTENTS.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. IN THE CITY BY THE SEA	1
II. AFTER-THOUGHTS	17
III. FAIRIES	38
IV. "THE PRELUDE TO SOME BRIGHTER WORLD"	62
V. TEA-TIME IN ARCADIA	70
VI. UNCOMMITTED	84
VII. HE WOULD TAKE HIS TIME	106
VIII. A FACE IN THE CROWD	116
IX. "THOUGH LOVE, LIFE, AND DEATH SHOULD COME AND GO"	125
X. "AS THINGS THAT ARE NOT SHALL THESE THINGS BE"	134
XI. "ONE THREAD IN LIFE WORTH SPINNING"	146
XII. "ONE BORN TO LOVE YOU, SWEET"	166
XIII. "THE TIME OF LOVERS IS BRIEF"	172
XIV. AS A SPIRIT FROM DREAM TO DREAM	180
XV. "LOVE SHOULD BE ABSOLUTE LOVE"	190
XVI. TO LIVE FORGOTTEN AND LOVE FORLORN	207
XVII. "SHE WAS MORE FAIR THAN WORDS CAN SAY"	226
XVIII. "THE SHADOW PASSETH WHEN THE TREE SHALL FALL"	240
XIX. "HE SAID, 'SHE HAS A LOVELY FACE'"	249
XX. PEGGY'S CHANCE	269
XXI. "FROM THE EVIL TO COME"	289
XXII. "SO VERY WILFUL"	298
XXIII. THE LITTLE RIFT	309
XXIV. "POOR KIND WILD EYES SO DASHED WITH LIGHT QUICK TEARS"	326
XXV. "AND EVERY GENTLE PASSION SICK TO DEATH"	341
XXVI. "CLOSER AND CLOSER SWAM THE THUNDER-CLOUD"	362
XXVII. "THOU MAYST BE FALSE, AND YET I KNOW IT NOT"	379
XXVIII. IN THE BLUE CHAMBER	386
XXIX. "'TIS NOT THE SAME NOW, NEVER MORE CAN BE"	396
XXX. A DOUBLE EXILE	408
XXXI. "OH, TELL HER, BRIEF IS LIFE, BUT LOVE IS LONG"	413
XXXII. "A SCENE OF LIGHT AND GLORY"	423
XXXIII. "BOTH TOGETHER, HE HER GOD, SHE HIS IDOL"	426

THE VENETIANS.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE CITY BY THE SEA.

LITTLE golden cloudlets, liked winged living creatures, were hanging high up in the rosy glow above Santa Maria di Salute, and all along the Grand Canal the crowded gondolas were floating in a golden haze, and all the westward-facing palace windows flashed and shone with an illumination which the lamps and lanterns that were to be lighted after sundown could never equal, burned they never so merrily. It was Shrove Tuesday in Venice, Carnival-time, and a hum of joyous, foolish voices echoed along those palace façades, and floated out seaward, and rang along the narrow Calle, and drifted on the winding waterways and resounded under the innumerable bridges; for everywhere in the City of the Sea men, women, and children were making merry, and had given themselves up to a wild and childish rapture of unreasoning mirth, ready to explode into loud laughter at the sorriest jokes. An old man tapped upon the shoulder by a swinging paper lantern, a boy whose hat had been knocked off, a woman calling to her husband or her lover across the gay flotilla—anything was food for mirth on this holiday evening, while the great gold orb sank in the silvery lagoon, and all the sky yonder towards Chioggia was steeped in the crimson after-glow, and the Chioggian fishing-boats were moving westward in all the splendor of their painted sails.

At Danieli's the hall and staircase, reading-room, smoking-