

Tiepolos, and Adrian told me that Ruskin was all wrong about the dates of some of the buildings he most admired; how for a long time I could not think what it was that made the life of Venice seem so different from any other town, until I realised that there was no traffic, and that half the children of the town had never seen any horses except the bronze ones outside St Mark's, and Adrian told me that when, some months ago, a motor car had been landed on its way to the Lido, the crowd was so great to see it that two people were pushed over into the water and nearly drowned; how I discovered that an acquaintance of mine was a legendary figure in Venice, well thought of among the poor as the eccentric English milord who had bought up all the cauliflowers in the vegetable market and floated them down the Grand Canal; how I purchased a Tauchnitz edition of *St Mark's Rest* at Alinari's, and reflected that unlike most men of letters, Ruskin would have led a much more valuable life if he had been a Roman Catholic?

No, it seems to me a moment for humility. Perhaps if I made my home in Venice for twenty years and attained a perfect command of mediæval Italian; if I spent months in public and private libraries translating and collating original sources; if I learned almost everything about the chemistry of painting, scraped bits off frescoes and had them analysed, made X-ray studies of them, and trotted all over Europe comparing them with other versions; if I steeped myself in the latest æsthetic theories; if I became adept at particularising among all manner of conflicting and incongruous influences, tracing in one and the same object, here the Byzantine, there the Moorish, there the Catholic, Frankish, or Norman motive; if I became a master of the subtle art of attribution, able delicately to shift reputation from shoulder to shoulder and identify the technique of one anonymous mason from the baser imitations of another – then perhaps I might decently contribute a chapter here to what has already been written by those who have mastered all these accomplishments. Meanwhile, since there seems no probability of my ever becoming anything more considerable than one of a hundred globe-trotting novelists, I will pass on to Ragusa.

I think I may, without offence, assume in many of my readers an incomplete acquaintance with this town. It is now called Dubrovnik,

a somewhat unhelpful change, after the manner of new nationalities, which coincided with the rechristening of Cattaro, Kotor and Spalato, Split. It has until quite lately had an interesting and honourable history, being one of the free city states of the west which, generation after generation, by courage and guile and good fortune, was enabled to maintain its integrity against barbarian influence. It was founded originally by the fugitives driven by heathen invasion from Salona and Epidamus; these established an aristocratic administration of forty-five senatorial families and an elected rector, more or less parallel to the Council and Doge at Venice. They owed nominal allegiance to the Emperor at Byzantium until the Fourth Crusade, and after that to Venice, but they were in all practical matters self-governing and independent. They became wealthy through general trade and the salt mines at Stagno, and at the middle of the seventeenth century had a population of 33,000, with 360 vessels and a standing army of 4,000. They were obliged to live throughout the whole of this period in a state of perpetual defence, first against the Slavs, Bosnians, and Serbs, and later against the Turks, who became masters of the entire mainland, hemming them in precariously between the mountains and the sea. In 1667 Ragusa suffered a plague and earthquake which reduced it, in one catastrophe, from a thriving city to a small coast town. It recovered slowly and incompletely, and at the end of the eighteenth century passed into the hands of the Austrians, but, although no longer politically considerable, it remained Catholic, aristocratic, and cultured, immeasurably aloof from its savage neighbours. It was the simple task of the allied statesmen of the Peace Conference to undo the work of a thousand years and hand it over to its traditional enemies, the mongrel kingdom of the Jugo-Slavs.

There is a little harbour under the walls of Ragusa, but larger ships anchor off Gravosa, the commercial landing-stage a short tram-ride from the town. The day of our visit was a religious festival of the Eastern calendar, and the shops were therefore compulsorily closed. This was a real hardship on the inhabitants, to whom the arrival of a big ship is a rare and exceedingly lucrative occurrence; the overwhelming majority of them, all, in fact, except the Serbian officials and garrison, are Roman Catholics, for whom the day had

no significance. The Slav officials, however, who, I think, are made to feel very conscious of their social inferiority in these imperial towns, were closely on the lookout for any infringement of the law, and it was only with difficulty that we could obtain access to the public buildings.

The chief of these are the Rector's Palace and the Sponza, or Custom House. These are naturally quite small and, after Venice, comparatively simple, but they are well preserved, dignified and peculiarly charming in design, and full of fine workmanship. The Rector's Palace is attributed to Michelozzo Michelozzi, the architect of the Palazzo Riccardi at Florence. The Custom House has a window and balcony of graceful fourteenth-century Venetian Gothic. There are also small Dominican and Franciscan monasteries, the latter containing an exquisite little romanesque cloister, planted in the centre with a garden of orange-trees, cactuses, and evergreens from which rise a little fountain and the statue of a saint. The churches, except for the crude and modern Orthodox cathedral, are all interesting; Santa Maria Maggiore contains two very dubious paintings attributed to Titian and Andrea del Sarto; San Salvatore has a lovely sixteenth-century façade; the cathedral is good early eighteenth-century baroque. There are remains of several of the noble houses, with armorial carvings over the doors, but most of these have sunk into poor hands and are split up into tenement dwellings; that the aristocratic tradition survived, however, was clear from the bearing of several very dowdy and very august grandes dames whom I observed at their prayers, and from the general courtesy and dignity of the townspeople. Most of these were smartly dressed and vivacious in manner, exchanging greetings and jokes at the cafés and promenading the broad main street of the town – called, inevitably, the Stradone – with a delightfully modified swagger. There were a few country people in from the hills, looking very clean and starched in their peasant costumes, the men with highly decorative daggers sticking from their sashes. There was a band playing in the evening in the main square outside the walls, and down in Gravosa they let off some fireworks, but whether in honour of the *Stella's* arrival or of the Orthodox festival I was unable to discover. That evening we sailed down the coast to Catarro.

Catarro has been exposed to much the same historical influences as Ragusa, though her history is less eminent. She was never a free town except for thirty years at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Before that time she was held from 1185 successively by the Nemanja dynasty of Serbs, Lewis the Great of the Hungarian-Croat Empire, and the Bosnian King Tvrtko I. In 1420 she came again under Western influence, and was held by Venice until 1797, when the Austrians took possession of her, and, except for a brief interlude during the Napoleonic period when Russia and France had her in turn, remained in possession until the Peace Conference. The original Roman population became extensively diluted by Slav blood during the Middle Ages, but it is interesting to note, in view of modern Slavonic pretensions, that when the Venetians took over the town, Western culture had so far survived that all documents were still in Latin, and Italian was the language of the courts of law. From 1420 until 1918 the town was wholly under Western influence, until, with Ragusa and the rest of the Dalmatian coast, it was bundled into Jugo-Slavia.

Like Ragusa, it suffered from earthquakes and plagues, and has never recovered its mediæval population. It is a smaller town than Ragusa, much less attractive architecturally, built on a triangle of alluvial soil at the end of a deep fiord. Owing to the strict limit imposed on expansion by the nature of the site, the streets are extremely narrow and the houses jumbled on top of each other; there is none of the spaciousness of Ragusa, and no equivalent to the Stradone; the people seemed poorer, less leisurely, less sociable with each other, less courteous to strangers; they stared and begged when we came ashore as they had not done at Ragusa. Nevertheless, it looked very attractive from the water, huddled at the foot of a great rock cleft away from the wooded hillside. A fortified stone wall climbed up this crag, protecting the town from the rear and making a triangle, with the sea front for base and the Citadel of St John as the apex, 260 metres up. Half-way up to the summit is a little chapel clearly visible from below.

Catarro is full of churches – there are said to have been thirty at one time – all of them Roman Catholic except two; one of these is the repulsive modern Serbian-Orthodox cathedral of St Nicholas,

and the other the fine twelfth-century church of St Lucas, which the Catholics handed over to Orthodox refugees from Turkish persecution in the middle of the seventeenth century. The largest and oldest Catholic church is St Tryphon's, but it has little to commend it except antiquity. St Tryphon is little known outside the town of his burial; his most renowned exploit was the cure of a widow's son who had been bitten by a basilisk, an incident which is attractively recorded in the fourteenth-century ciborium of the high altar. St Joseph's has a picture they claim is by Veronese, and St Mary's a crucifix of wood, plaster, and canvas attributed to Michelangelo; the Franciscan Church of St Clara has a very gorgeous baroque altar of coloured marble. The secular buildings are picturesque but boring. I do not think it is a town where anyone except the most hardened water-colourist would want to stay for very long.

There is a very good road built by the Austrians that leads up from Catarro to Cetinje, the capital of Montenegro. On the atlas the distance looks very small, but the ascent is so steep that there are between twenty and thirty hairpin bends before it reaches the pass in the mountains and leads down to the plateau on which Cetinje stands. From the *Stella's* deck one could trace the path up the mountain-side, twisting backwards and forwards among the rocks and scrub until it was lost to sight three thousand feet up. I joined the *Stella* expedition, and it took us two and a half hours' hard driving to cover the distance, which, as the crow flies, measured on the map, is rather under eight miles.

We started soon after breakfast in five or six cars, and arrived just at luncheon time. To avoid running in each other's dust, the drivers, as soon as we started, spaced themselves out at long intervals along the road. The ascent in places was so steep, and the road so carefully graded that we could shout to the parties above and below, although there was, perhaps, a half-mile of road between us, as though to someone in the upper windows of a house. By the time we reached the summit the *Stella* and the fiord in which she lay had grown minute and unreal, and a great stretch of the Adriatic coast lay exposed behind us, and in front and on either side ridge upon ridge of mountain.

The road ran straight for some distance; the air was cold and clear; there were patches and drifts of snow in sheltered places and no sign of human habitation. No sign of human habitation, but many signs of human activity. I have but a very slight acquaintance with mountainous country, so I cannot tell whether I am recording a commonplace of all such districts or whether what surprised me so much was indeed peculiar to Montenegro. That was that the boulders and cliffs that comprised the landscape all round us were varied at quite frequent intervals by deep, usually circular craters and basins, with rocky sides and a flat surface of soil at the bottom, no bigger in many cases than the floor of a large room, at the most not thirty yards in diameter. Yet in the majority of cases these little pot-holes of earth, so inaccessible from farm or market, bore every indication of being rudely but carefully cultivated. The crop, whatever it was, was still quite immature, just regular lines of green shoots protruding a few inches above the soil, but it was quite clearly no accidental growth. It puzzled me very much to think who could be the farmer of these ungrateful acres.

Presently the road began to descend slightly, and then ran quite straight across a plain of arable land into Cetinje. Since it is the capital of a large province, and was until quite recently the capital of an independent kingdom, it is seemly to speak of Cetinje as a town, though actually it is no more than a large village, spaciouly laid out and ornamented by one or two public buildings, no larger certainly than might be found in most English villages, but in this part of the world uncommonly large for anything except a town of some importance. The palace is about the size of the average English rectory; its largest room is occupied by a billiard table, which so far eclipsed the other concomitants of royalty in the eyes of the neighbouring highlanders that the palace became known, not as the house of the king, but as Billjarda, the house of the billiard table. This billiard table added very considerably to the prestige of the royal family, but it had the disadvantage of entirely filling the only room suitable for official receptions. These, indeed, occurred so rarely that the inconvenience was trifling; when, however, someone did come to visit the King of Montenegro, or some event of national importance such as the christening or marriage of a child had to be celebrated, the

German legation, which was in every way more commodious, used to be borrowed for the party.

Another building of prominence was, or rather had been, the hotel, for this had caught fire some time before our visit and been totally demolished. Fortunately no one was staying there at the time; but, indeed, it would have been a peculiarly unfortunate coincidence if there had been, since fires and visitors are equally unusual events at Cetinje. Our arrival, therefore, in six dusty motor cars, had been carefully prepared for, and Montenegrins from all over the province had put on their best clothes and come into town to see the tourists and, if they could, make a little money. On the occasion of the first conducted tour arriving in Cetinje, some thirty or so years ago, the king himself had ridden out to greet them at the head of his household cavalry, and had so frightened the tourists by his salvoes of blank cartridges, a little wildly fired from the hip, that it was all the guides could do to persuade them to drive on into the town and attend the banquet prepared for them. There was no such demonstration for us, but the urchins of the country gave us a gentler welcome by throwing bunches of wild flowers into our laps as we drove past their houses.

As I have remarked, the hotel had lately been destroyed; luncheon was therefore served on trestle tables in the House of Parliament. It is only fair to say that this was no very serious degradation to the building, since even in the days of the kingdom it had combined a double office, being the legislature by day and the theatre by night. There was a stage at the end, surmounted by a crowned cypher, and on one of the walls hung a large, symbolic oil-painting, representing a man in Montenegrin national costume who held in one hand the fasces and in the other the mane of a live lion. This emblem of nationality reminded me strongly of the cartoons which appeared during the war. At one time, I remember, there was a strongly supported movement to make much of Montenegro. There was, if I remember rightly, a Montenegrin flag day, and 'Brave little Montenegro' for a very short time was a phrase of almost equal potency to 'Brave little Belgium' or 'Russian Steamroller'.

Luncheon was very bad indeed, even though it was cooked in the office of the commissar of police; the wine was a dark-coloured local

vintage, not red but not exactly black, the colour one's fountain-pen makes when one dips it accidentally into the red inkpot; it was very sour and left a temporarily indelible stain on the tongue and teeth. After luncheon we walked round the broad lanes of the town, and visited the shops, where the stock of peasant textiles (indistinguishable from the products of Hampstead arts and crafts) was supplemented for the occasion by all kinds of curios, some of them crosses and bits of jewellery but mostly daggers and pistols with elaborately decorated hilts and butts. I presume that these were brought in by the owners and sold for them on heaven knows what exorbitant commission. It seemed to me rather pathetic to see them there, because among Balkan peoples these are often the only possessions of value, and are a real source of pride, being handed down from father to son, as symbols of family importance as well as of personal valour and independence. Most of them, I think, would have been of doubtful efficiency in prosecuting the blood feuds which enliven Montenegrin life. Indeed, I expect that it is futile to sentimentalise about them. Most likely the owners were saving up to buy cartridges for a stolen army rifle, and so snipe the neighbours in a more deadly manner from behind their pig-styes.

The drive back was quicker and far more hazardous than the ascent. There was just time for a swim in the fiord before the *Stella* sailed again.