

Evening at Cavtat

JUGOSLAVIA

CLARE LEIGHTON

Woodcuts by the Author

THE real life of any country is that which guide books seem utterly unaware of — one which is, perhaps, most effectively reached through the open-sesame of a sketch book. Sibenik was the first town in Jugoslavia which I reached. After the Italian civilization of Zara, with its Venetian streets and churches and its Italian-speaking people, Sibenik seems wild. It was the more bewildering because Serbian was not only spoken but was everywhere written in the Cyrillic alphabet which so few of us can read. Very soon, however, none of this mattered; immediately the people discovered that I wanted to make sketches of them, they took me into their confidence. And now, through my mind there runs the rhythmic memory of little sunlit seaports and uncounted soft islands like large, closed-winged butterflies, seemingly afloat on the deep blue of the Adriatic. Sun-silvered olive trees shimmer on rocky hills. Everywhere one finds harmony — in the regular strokes of the

long-oared fishing boats with their orange sails, in the swinging walk of the white-costumed women of the Konavle Valley, in the wild songs that are sung at eventide as the women spin and the men lay their nets.

Sibenik is a world of orange-capped, rough men with braided coats flung over their shoulders, and wide-cheek-boned women in shaggy woven dresses and fringed aprons. It is at noonday that these little Yugoslav towns are most entirely themselves, with the bright colors of the costumes and the wares in the market stalls, and the shouts of the vendors. At midday life centres round the quays where little boats are filled with these bright-hued folk, who fade away into the desolation of the miniature islands in the Adriatic. From noon until evening the villages are deserted; the sun beats down on the white streets and quays, and except for the boats rocking on the water, nothing moves. But when evening comes, the towns waken to the music of the village bands. Gaily lighted cafés appear from nowhere, the girls court and are courted on the quays, and the little boats — silver-gray on the ink-black water — dance to the music.

About the larger towns there is a strange feeling of theatricality. The backgrounds of houses and markets and village squares look like painted back drops. I sat at dinner at Split with a stage setting of painted houses and oleanders. It was the same at Sibenik and Dubrovnik. I had to touch the stone-slabbed roofs and Turkish shops at Mostar to see that they were real. They looked like the scenery for the Russian Ballet. There is the same lack of twentieth-century reality about the native costumes. I have not been far inland to see the even more elaborate dresses of Macedonia or Bosnia, but in Dalmatia and Herzegovina I have seen costumes that make one gasp, they have such beauty. On Sundays and feast days the glories of the native dress are doubled. The gowns of the Konavle women glow, their earrings and silver filigree buttons shine, and the coats of the people of Herzegovina are backgrounds of arabesques in gold thread. One day I turned into a rocky lane near Trebinje and came upon a *festa* — a living kaleidoscope of crimson, bright blue, orange, gold, and black.

Jugoslavia is a land of *festas*. The old paganism, with all its ritual, still lives in the castle villages near Split. *Festas* are held in the hills; whole sheep are roasted, wine flows freely, and the people sing and dance. Interwoven with their love of pageantry



Loading the Ponies, Caviat

is a fierce, childish belief in all superstitions. The wildest tale is given credence.

One of the happiest days I spent in Yugoslavia was the day I discovered Marin Studin — one of the foremost Yugoslav sculptors of the rising generation. He is the pure peasant type, born of the people, son of the soil. In this lies his strength and it is this that makes one feel the richer for having come in contact with him. I was taken to see his old peasant mother in his village of Kastel — a hamlet of crumbling stone houses, spinning women, and sun-splashed white oxen. From the age-worn stone steps in the living room one could almost touch the hay in a loft opposite, and on the thatched crossbeams over the alleyway a dozen hens sat in a row in the sun. Life was delightfully simple, the diet chiefly one of figs and home-made wine.

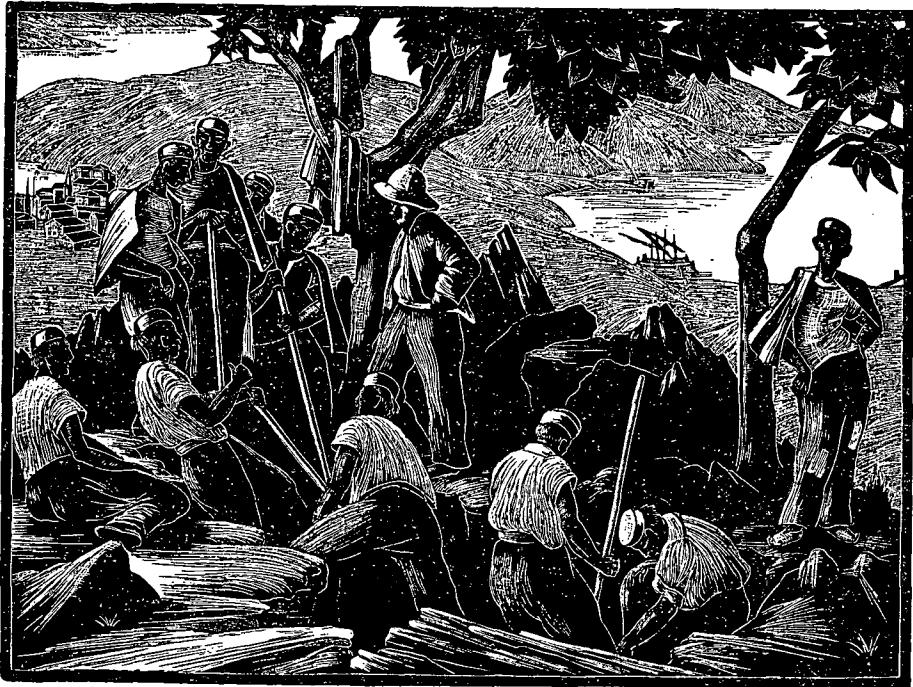
We went to the village church to see Studin's wooden saints — his gifts to the little town he loved so dearly. Two or three old spinning women called out blessings on him as we passed. His carved wooden saints, it was said, had worked miracles. We later visited his workshop. Under the window flapped the waves of the Adriatic. His studio had logs of trees lying about, waiting, as in an inverted mythology, to be changed into goddesses, Madonnas, and saints.

Other experiences jostle in my memory — acts of graciousness toward me, examples of unbounded generosity. I could never sit down to make a sketch of a farm but the farmer or his wife appeared with handfuls of figs or great bunches of grapes. Late one evening I sat by the roadside drawing a bridge. There appeared, as if from nowhere, a white-clad peasant woman and offered me the most perfect bunch of grapes from her basket. She stroked my hair, patted my hand, and disappeared. I later wondered if I had only imagined her. Everywhere the people were gracious. They would place a wine cart in position for me, or show me a beautiful flower they felt certain I should draw.

Train travel in Yugoslavia is vastly amusing. I recall going up to Sinj to see the eight-hundred-year-old tilting festival of the Alka. The small toy train was packed; people clung to it as flies to flypaper. The midday sun blazed relentlessly on us and the cinders from the engine fell like black hail. I put up my sunshade against it all, to the boisterous amusement of that train load. At each station the people swarmed out to drink water. The scores who had no seats tore down stones from the walls of the villages

where we stopped to make "chairs" for themselves in the luggage van. Soon we took a new interest in life — there were figs to buy, and grapes, and melons. But I had only two hands, and what was to be done when one was needed for my sunshade and the other to steady myself? My fruit waited for me in my lap. And then a delightful thing happened: the little peasant woman sitting next to me firmly held my arm and took hold of my sunshade that I might eat in comfort. There were tunnels to pass through — long lanes of sulphurous blackness that made one choke. But we could shout to people in the next carriage in bad German or Italian, the peasants sang, and we were going to the Alka.

Then there were ten hours to Mostar, in a third-class carriage. Again the people got out at each halt to drink, and again they ate and sang until night came and their heads began to droop. But there was great excitement. It seemed that the head of the Serbian Church was traveling in our train. Well into the night the little wayside stations were crowded with singing, cheering people, waiting for his blessing. What they sang seemed to be the



Sibenik Workmen

rattling tune of our once popular song: "We All Go the Same Way Home." I have since heard that it is the Croatian National Anthem.

The Golden Age is still reflected in the sailing ships on the Adriatic. Everywhere are patched, orange-sailed ships, moving proudly. Romance lies in the hovering darkness. At Split — "the town of the dancing markets" — the market is held in little boats. The rudders of the ships are removed and placed horizontally, connecting the stern of the boat with the quay. On these old wooden rudder stalls are spread oranges, vegetables, pots and pans, swaying gently as the water sucks at the boats. Under awnings lie sun-bronzed men, naked to the waist, keeping guard like sleeping dragons over piles of green melons or oranges.

Leaving Jugoslavia, I realized that I had been in a world of true values. "Clippety-clop" went the old white horse as we drove to the station in our rickety little cart. The moon silvered the Adriatic behind me and the fantastic dark shapes of olive trees flung their shadows across the white road. We passed a group of peasants sitting around a smoky fire, preparing for a night on the mountain side. They were singing a song as weird as the waving shadows of the olive trees. A sense of great peace came over me: I had felt the great friendliness of the Dalmatian mountains:



Cavtat

THRILLS, COMMON AND UNCOMMON

CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN;

IDEALS change, like everything else. Time was when we aspired to wealth, to glory, to undying fame. Every man thought himself entitled to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Now we devote ourselves to the pursuit of thrills. The critic coldly turns from book or picture, dismissing the unworthy effort with — "It gives me no thrill," or warmly admires another production because it does. Children have the advantage of us in this sensation, as the fresh field of inexperience makes each new impression thrilling. The younger they are, the more easily thrilled — "pleased with a rattle, tickled with a straw."

The child, of course, enjoys what thrills him and repeats the indulgence until to his dull disappointment it no longer produces the desired effect. He is no philosopher. He does not in the least understand the mechanism of the nervous system carrying the sensation he seeks. Being a child, he has no background of previous experience to learn from, much less the historic background wherein he might observe his innumerable ancestors making fools of themselves all along the ages in endless repetition of the same childish behavior.

Perhaps our present renewed eagerness for thrills is due to the marvelous peculiarity of to-day — youth. Never before, apparently, have we been blessed with that great gift. Says this newcomer to those before him, or her, "I am the most important person in the world." The previous incumbent, studying the claim, replies: "Ah, I see. You have discovered youth and invented sex; you are indeed important." In later years, when we have got over this attack of youth, perhaps poets will be writing historic verse, humorous verse, about the early twentieth century, "When We Were Very Young."

When dealers in candy employ new assistants, the custom is to urge them to eat all they wish. They do. Quite a thrill at first to have a whole shopful of sweetmeats to choose from. So they help themselves, they eat, they stuff, and alas! the thrill turns to indifference and then to aversion. Perhaps there may have been some sugar philosopher who had sense enough to limit his indulgence and keep his enjoyment; but we do not hear of him.

In a sense the thrill-seekers are entirely right. The process of