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THE TANGLE AT TRIESTE

Where Boundaries Are Blurred And Races Are Mixed

(Written for "The Listener" by A.M.R.).

VENEZIA GIULIA has only two towns of note—one at each end. As we reached the ridge of the Alps, climbing out of Carinthia, the Italian customs-officer at Tarvisio was insistent—"You must also visit Trieste—oh you must."

Tarvisio is exactly at the point where three frontiers, and three cultures, meet. That is why, depending on the date of your map and its country of origin, you may find it also written as Tarvis (German) or Tarvic (Yugoslav—pronounce Tarvitch). By this, the lowest Alpine pass, hardly above the treeline, Napoleon pressed on towards Vienna after the Italian campaign that made his name and career. Through its railway yard, strangely situated on a man-made flat below the close-packed tiny stone town, and with dolomite fingers, snow-streaked even in summer, pointing skyward all around, it is General Alexander's sole supply route into Karenten (Carinthia) and Steiermark (Styria).

Plumed bersaglieri at coffee tables in the flagstoned stepped streets were the only definitely Italian feature of Tarvis-Tarvisio-Tarvic. But before we had bounded a few kilometres downhill, good green German grass faded away into sometime-terraced rock. Tier upon tier of dilapidated hovels crouched under the gorge cliff and ragged children ran out screeching "Bicyclella!" as our tandem flew past.

That night we slept, no longer on a mattresses of hay 15 feet thick in some steep-roofed wooden barn, but on a tabletop ledge of rock between road and torrent. Through the darkness came soft little laughter and the ghost of chattering. The whirring glow of the primus fell upon eager little faces, dark little hands offering flowers and wild cherries, and the whitest of smiling teeth. The next evening wine was pressed upon us among vines and fruit trees in that Garden of the Lord called the North Italian Plain. But, bountiful plain or mountain poverty, both were an entire world removed from the universal neatness, restraint, cleanliness and industry of Austria's rain-washed valleys only 25 miles away as the mole burrows.

"Inextricably Mixed"

However, political frontiers so geographically and culturally distinct as this exist only between Europe's western nations. As you move East, where historical divisions are tribal not national, most boundaries are blurred. German and Italian meet peacefully on a knife-edge at Tarvis: at Trieste only 50 miles away Italian and Yugoslav are inextricably mixed.

(continued on next page)

"I HATE TO BRAG!"

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