

YUGOSLAVIA: Land Of Pigs Plums And Heroic Peasants

(Written for "The Listener" by REV. W. S. ROLLINGS)

YUGOSLAVIA is a nation of peasants without an aristocracy. Economically the country is distinguished by the number of its pig-pens and plum trees. This is no reflection on the heroic people now struggling to maintain national freedom. In Ireland the pig is "the gentleman that pays the rent." In Yugoslavia he contributes a large share of the family income, and also a substantial sum to the national treasury. The founders of the two Serbian Dynasties were worthy pig-breeders. In Serbia the pig fills the place in the national economy that the dairy cow does in New Zealand. An economic crisis arose some years ago from what is known as the "Pig War." A tariff war reduced the income of the peasants and the national finances until new markets were found for their pork and bacon. Germany has drawn largely on Yugoslavia for bacon and lard supplies which have helped to grease the Nazi war machine.

Plum trees everywhere abound. In parts the apple grows, and vineyards flourish. But the plum tree is king. Its fruit is fermented into wine and distilled into alcohol and exported as prunes. There are, of course, other industries. The river valleys yield harvests of wheat, barley and maize. The oaks and beeches which clothe Yugoslavia's mountains are milled into timber. Its coal, iron and manganese deposits are extensively worked, and subsidiary secondary industries are being established. But the pig still pays the piper!

Why Yugoslavia?

Following the Great War, Serbia became merged in a greater nation, comprising Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, named Yugoslavia. "Yug" is Slav for "south." So this compound stands for the land of the southern Slavs. The Slavs of central and northern Europe—Czechs, Slovaks, Ruthenes, and Poles—are separated from their southern kindred by a wedge of Germans, Magyars, and Rumanians. With the exception of the Bulgars, all the members of the south-

ern Slav family are included in the household of Yugoslavia.

Within Yugoslavia the main division has been between the Croats and the Serbs. Though their language is practically identical, the Croats use the Latin alphabet while the Serbs use the Cyrillic (modified Greek) script. The Croats are Catholics, while the Serbs belong to the Greek Orthodox Church.

Other branches of the family are the Slovenes, the Dalmatians, the Herzegovinians, and the Montenegrins.

Heroic Ancestry

Behind these southern Slavs is a noble historic tradition reaching back twelve centuries. They were civilised Christians and powerful nations when the Teutonic tribes beyond the Danube were emerging from paganism. They pressed into Europe from the region of the Don Cossacks in the early centuries of the Christian era. Those who pushed farthest into Croatia, Slavonia and Istria were evangelised by the Latin Churches. The main body came under the influence of Greek monks.

From the ninth to the twelfth centuries Croatia flourished as an independent kingdom. It was then conquered by Hungary, and for eight centuries functioned under Magyar overlordship, with a large measure of home rule.

Serbia in the early Middle Ages blossomed into an empire and established its capital at Belgrade. During the thirteenth century it dominated the whole of the Balkan Peninsula, and Serbia Tsars were powerful enough to challenge the rule of Byzantine emperors. According to one authority it produced a code of law unique in medieval records, developed a prosperous commerce and mining industries and seemed on the point of striking a new note in architecture.

Catastrophe

Three and a-half centuries after the conquest of Croatia by Hungary the Empire of Serbia was laid low. Constantinople fell before the Turks in 1453. In



A YUGOSLAV lemonade seller

1463 Serbia was crushed in the battle of Kosova. Then followed four centuries of political servitude under Islam.

Strength and Endurance

The power to endure is one of the greatest tests both for the individual and the nation. And for four centuries Serbian fortitude, under national and spiritual adversity, proved a bastion against Turkish aggression in Europe. Two forces kept alive the national spirit and fed the flame of freedom: the ballads which enshrined the patriotic sentiment of the people; and the devoted ministry of the church, which kept burning in the national soul the light of faith and hope.

During all these dark centuries the Serbian sky was illuminated with a flame of heroic resistance never outshone in the annals of any but pagans to the sword. But "people of the Book" (Jews and Christians) were spared, provided they paid tribute and refrained from proselytising. In the mountains of Serbia there was a group that refused these conditions. They fought the conquerors and maintained their faith and freedom. They were led by a succession of warrior priests. Their mountain eyrie was called Montenegro (Black mountain)—a lighthouse of freedom against which waves of Turkish assaults broke in vain.

Freedom's New Dawn

The Serbs were the first of the Balkan peoples to strike a blow for freedom. In 1804 Black George (Karageorgevitch) kindled the flame of revolt. The struggle lasted four years and was crowned with emancipation from Turkish rule. The Serbs received no help from any outside power, so Serbia had the rare distinction of being "a self-made man among States." The boy ruler, King Peter, is a descendant from Karageorgevitch, the hero of Serbian emancipation.



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