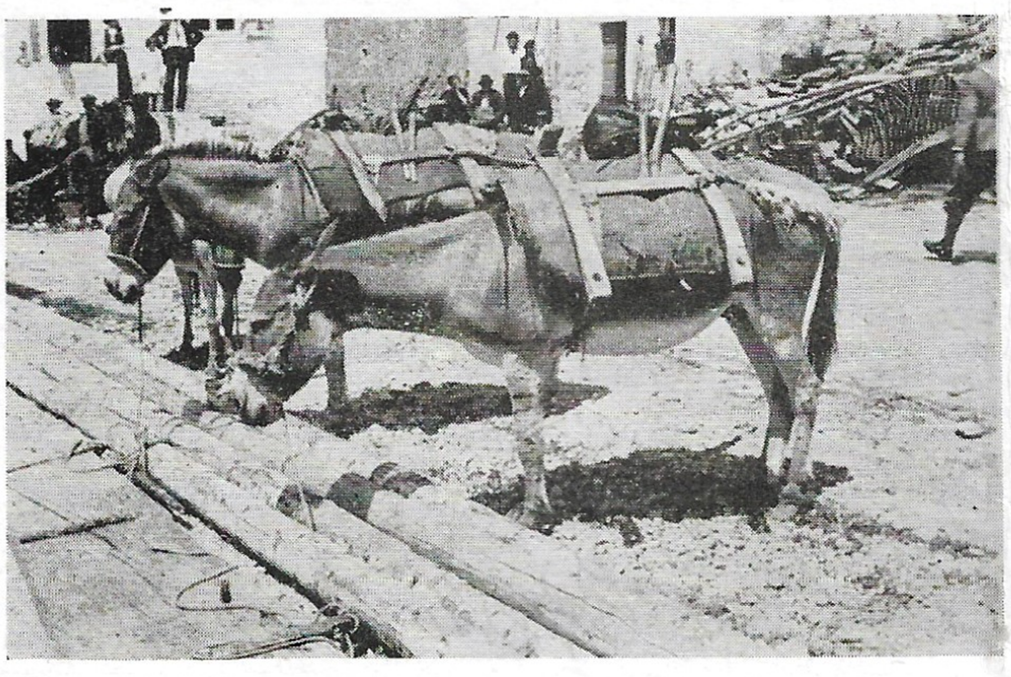


THEY BRING IN THE PLANTS

The rosemary bush (*Rosmarinus Officinalis*) grows wild and abundant on most of the Dalmatian Islands. Important are the islands of Brac, Hvar (Lesina) and Vis, now belonging to Jugo-Slavia, and the island of Cherso, part of Italy since 1918. Distinguished as producing center of the best quality oil is the Village of Brusje (Island of Hvar) with its farmer co-operative.

Rosemary grows about three feet high and blossoms from Fall to Spring, but most luxuriously in May and June, when whole mountain slopes often appear in a delicate and beautiful, bluish hue. The best time for harvest is from the end of August to the end of September. During this period the female population of the villages cut the twigs with sickles. If not carefully cut the plant is likely to perish. Clipping is done systematically according to the development of the bush and with a view to sparing the weaker plants, thus giving them a respite of one to two years.

The cut plant material is transported to the villages and subsequently stored until the dried leaves start to fall off the twigs. This process is sometimes referred to in literature as fermenting. Actually it is only a drying process facilitating the removal of the leaves from the twigs which process is sometimes finished by simple and gentle threshing.

An important feature which should be noted is that in Dalmatia only the leaves of rosemary are distilled and not the twigs and wooden plant parts.

Distillation is carried out in the villages by individual farmers or farmer co-operatives, often in primitive direct fire stills, which because of their Oriental shape remind of Bulgarian rose oil stills of Turkish origin. Such a still, usually holding 100 liters, is charged with 30 kilos of leaves and 80 liters of water. The dry rosemary twigs from which the leaves are previously removed serve as fuel for the open fire beneath. Distillation lasts from two to three hours and the yield of oil on an average amounts to two per cent.

Of course, there are also quite a number of large scale modern steam stills in operation, owned mostly by co-operatives. Before the war, distillation of rosemary in Dalmatia was purely a home industry and for this purpose the farmers used the same stills which served during other periods of the year, for distilling brandy. In fact, the Dalmatian farmer population almost seems to have considered oil of rosemary akin to "Slivovitz" for they used to sell twenty grams of rosemary oil (about ¾ounce) at two kronen (40c) as a remedy for stomach trouble!

The former Austrian-Hungarian government spared neither effort nor money to promote the distillation of rosemary oil. Experimental plantations of rosemary were started although it appears that rosemary remains more hardy when growing spontaneously and wild on the open hill slopes. Of course, the prevailing low prices for rosemary oil absolutely prevent successful cultivation of the plant which demands initial capital investment and much care during the current year. The government also encouraged the farmers to unite into co-operatives of which several important ones survive in Brusje and Grablje.

The greatest impetus for the production of rosemary oil was given by the former Austrian government when this oil was introduced into the pharmacopoeia of the old monarchy as an official denaturant for industrial alcohol. This feature created a steady demand, at uniform prices, on the part of a large consuming territory. Indeed, oil of rosemary, if added in the right proportion seems hardly to affect the odor of alcohol but it does have a decided effect on the flavor, thus making industrial alcohol unpalatable yet well suited for other purposes.

Before the war Dalmatia produced up to twenty thousand kilos of oil of rosemary a year. With the breaking up of the old Empire this figure diminished greatly. Ten thousand kilos now seems to be a high estimate. Exact figures are hard to obtain since the oil is shipped from various ports. Trieste, formerly the



A TYPICAL DALMATIAN VILLAGE