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The Southern Frontiers of Austria: Discussion

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Authorities to be consulted on Life of Charles the Great.

- ‘Regesten unter den Karolingern, A.D. 751–918.’ Pt. I., pp. 60–225, 1899.
 ‘Life of Charles the Great.’ By Abel. 2nd edition. 2 vols. Leipzig, 1883–8,
 in series of ‘Jahrbücher des Deutschen Reiches.’
 ‘Annalen des Deutschen Geschichte.’ Richter. Vol. 2. Halle, 1885.

Postscript.

A recent paper, “**Oesterreichisch-Italienische Grenzfragen von Dr. R. von Pfaundler, Wien**” (*Petermanns Mitteilungen*, June, 1915), is a painstaking and able plea in favour of the frontier offered by Austria. Its argument rests mainly on linguistic and racial considerations with some reference to existing administrative boundaries. The writer apparently inclines to give the Ampezzo district to Italy. In this case he works out from the census of 1910 the figures as follows:—

Territory ceded by Austria :	{	Italians and Ladinians, 366,837
	{	Germans, 13,892
Territory retained by Austria :	{	Germans, 511,222
	{	Italians and Ladinians, 18,863

He proceeds to give figures for the frontier officially claimed by Italy.

Territory claimed from Austria :	{	Italians and Ladinians, 371,477
	{	Germans, 74,000
Territory retained by Austria :	{	Germans, 440,805
	{	Italians and Ladinians, 14,229
The population of the Ampezzo district is stated to be	{	Italians and Ladinians, 5,990
	{	Germans, 443

From a practical and judicial point of view the weakness of the case presented is that it ignores the strategic objections that may be raised by Italy while insisting on those alleged by Austria. Botzen and its surroundings, with the control of the mouths of the great valleys and the access to Trent, are the substantial bone of contention.

The accompanying map, in laying down the frontiers offered by Austria, is not in accordance with the statements of Baron Burian recorded in the despatches of the Italian ambassador at Vienna of April 16 and 25, 1915. In these the line indicated keeps for Austria more of the Nonsberg and the districts both of Fassa and Ampezzo.

Sir MAURICE DE BUNSEN : I have really no title to address you this evening, but owing to the fact that for a few months—less than a year—I had the honour of representing this country at Vienna, I naturally take a deep interest in all the matters that have been so clearly explained to us and illustrated this evening. I was not there long enough really to travel much, but I did take one journey which brought me into a part of the region which we have heard about to-night, and I feel very grateful to our President for the clear way in which he has described to us that important frontier, which I confess till now has been full of mystery to me. I think I shall henceforth be able to follow more intelligently the accounts which we receive every day of the progress of the Italian arms in that region. The only journey I took was from Vienna through Graz (that entirely German town), through Laibach, entirely Slovene, where if you ask your way in German you won't be understood, onwards towards Trieste, passing the wonderful Adelsberg caves in the Karst that our President referred to—a ridge

between Trieste and the Italian frontier. They are wonderful caves, and I think the most extensive and marvellous I ever saw. From there I went on to Trieste, where my wife and I were the guests of our Admiral Sir Berkeley Milne who had brought the British Mediterranean Fleet to pay a friendly visit to Trieste and to the Austrian people, two or three months only before this devastating war broke out. I stayed with him on board his battle cruiser, the *Inflexible*, for several days. We were most hospitably received by the Austrian Admirals at Trieste. We exchanged toasts with them daily, and nothing was further from our minds than the idea that war between Austria and England could ever be possible. I cannot help looking back to that time and regretting the fact that we are compelled, by the bad choice that Austria has made of her friends, to be at war with Austria. They are a pleasant kindly people, and I do not give up the hope of being friendly with them again in future. The Austrian Admirals had nothing but friendly feelings towards our country. I could see that they had very bitter feelings towards Italy, and contemplated a war with Italy as a possibility of the future. From there we went to Venice and from Venice by motor in one day to Trent, and spent only one night and half the following day at Trent, but enough to see what has been described to us this evening,—how entirely Italian it is in character and the speech of its inhabitants. We felt ourselves almost back in Italy in this town of Trent. Then we went on to Botzen, where you get an entirely German-speaking country, and we should have explored it a little longer, but I think at this moment Essad Pasha committed some escapade in Albania which created a situation, compelling us to rush back to Vienna. So I have only a slight bowing acquaintance with this region, which after this evening I think we shall understand in greater detail, and for my part I am extremely grateful to the President for his address, which I think has been most illuminating and most valuable. I desire to tender him my thanks and to hope that some day we may all have an opportunity of visiting again those regions which he has described.

LORD BRYCE : There are two difficulties I feel in rising to say a few words in compliance with the President's request. The first is, I have been over nearly the whole of the ground he has described and have so many interesting memories of it, that if I were once to begin to indulge in reminiscences I should detain you all night ; and the second difficulty is a greater one, that I am in the position of agreeing with everything the President has said. I do not think I have ever listened to a more interesting lecture, or one which was more judiciously directed to matters of present importance than that which he has given us. I can only wish that he had had an audience of all the historians and all the soldiers—generals, colonels, and General Staff, in this country, as well as the geographers, because there is no part of Europe more significant now than this Alpine line where Italians and Germans and Slavs of all kinds have come into contact, and none which is more interesting to the soldier in respect of the opportunities of studying the peculiarities of mountain warfare which have arisen along this line. What the President has said about the difficulty of drawing an ethnological frontier of demarcation between the Italian and German population along the whole country from the eastern border of Switzerland as far as the place where the Slavonic population begins to come in to the north and west of Trieste, seemed to me, as far as I can judge from the observations I made in travelling about the country, to be exactly correct. It is true, as he has said, that although there is in Botzen an Italian-speaking element of perhaps one-third of the whole, still upon ethnological grounds that town and its neighbourhood ought to be assigned rather to the Teutonic than to the Italian race. The other valleys to the south-west and west of Botzen, such as the Val di Sole and Val di Non, are entirely Italian, though a few Germans are scattered here and there. There are

two very interesting valleys lying between the Italian and German speaking parts. These are the two valleys of the Grödner Thal and the Gader Thal, whose inhabitants speak neither Italian nor German, but a very ancient form of Romansch, which the people themselves call Ladin. Were they not so small they would do very well to constitute a sort of "buffer state" between the German and the Italian populations. The Ampezzo Valley is one of the districts where it is hard to draw a satisfactory line. When I first visited Cortina in 1863 it was a little place of not more than something like fifteen to twenty houses, and tourists were so strange that when five of us descended into it the whole population gathered round us, watched us eating our breakfast and stayed observing us until we departed. Now it is a town full of large hotels. Here the population is slightly mixed, and perhaps rather more Italian than German speaking, while Cadore, some 10 miles to the south, is pure Italian. It may seem surprising that the Italian troops should not have done more to try to get at the Trentino from the east through Val Sugana, because it is the most open of the valleys that give access to Trent, an easier way than over the Tonale, on the further side of the Adige Valley; but modern warfare offers enormous difficulties in mountainous countries to an attacking force. Where you come amongst rocks and cliffs and thick scrub and loose stones (as, unfortunately, we are finding in the Dardanelles) it is possible to plant batteries and hide machine guns in such wise as to expose the attacking party to a perfectly murderous fire. In confirmation of what the President and Sir Maurice de Bunsen have said about Austria and Italy I may remark that so long ago as 1889, when I was wandering along the line of passes north of Venice, we came upon a spot at the top of one of these passes—I think it was the Predil—where according to tradition Alboin, King of the Lombards, pointed out to his fierce invading host the fertile plains of Italy below. There we found on the Italian side strong fortifications, and going a little further north to the Austrian side more strong fortifications. Although both countries were members of the then recently formed Triple Alliance they entertained so much suspicion of one another that they had been erecting these fortifications each against the other. The President has given you a very graphic and charming account of the scenery about Ragusa, which is certainly one of the most picturesque of towns; and any one who wishes to make a delightful excursion in beautiful scenery combined with extremely interesting architecture and the most charmingly varied costumes worn in any part of Europe, cannot do better (when peace has been restored) than take a steamer from Trieste along the coast as far as Cattaro or Antivari.

As respects Mount Lovchen, it is a singularly noble peak with a marvellous view. It stands isolated, and on the top of it there is a tomb where one of the last of the Vladikas, or priest monarchs of Montenegro, is interred; so it has become a sort of sacred spot with the whole Montenegrin people. As its slopes command the inlet of Cattaro, one wonders that it was not found possible to carry up some guns there, and with those guns bombard Cattaro, Castelnuovo, and the other forts so as to drive the Austrians out of the harbour, which for naval occupation she finds very convenient. The subject of mountain warfare is an exceedingly interesting branch of military history upon which we may hope after the end of the war to learn much that is new. No campaigns, except that of Napoleon in 1797 and that of Suvarof against the French in the Swiss Alps in 1799, has thrown so much light on it as may be expected from these conflicts of Italian and Austrian troops along the line described by the President. These conflicts over glaciers and among those tremendous pinnacles of which such superb views have been shown this evening will have a new and special interest to us since we have heard the geography and orography of the region explained to us with so much lucidity and such complete mastery of the subject as the President has given us to-night.