

C H A P. IX.

DEBRETZIN—UNIVERSITY—NATRON—SOAP—BREAD—GUBA—
SALTPETRE MANUFACTORY—HORNED CATTLE—COURT OF
JUSTICE.

TO what circumstance Debretzin owes its existence I don't know; nor can I divine what can have induced thirty thousand people to select a country destitute of springs, rivers, building materials, fuel, and the heart-cheering vine, for their residence. Debretzin, though it has the title and privileges of a town, must be considered as a village; and then it is perhaps the greatest village in Europe. But should it be considered as a town, it is one of the worst, though its inhabitants are not the poorest. It is surrounded with a hedge, and the town-gates are like our field-gates, and stuck with thorns and brambles. The houses, with only a few exceptions, consist merely of the ground-floor; they are thatched, and have the gable-end turned towards the street: these are not paved; but, in a few of the most frequented, balks are laid down in the middle for the *Pictons*.

By far the greatest part of the inhabitants are Calvinists: their gloomy manners and dress, together with the gloomy weather that
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happened during my stay here, made this altogether a dismal place. The principal college of this sect in the kingdom is here. The building is irregular, old and decaying; much resembling one of our alms-houses, when on the point of being taken down and sold for old materials: yet often in such dismal abodes, not only deep learning has been acquired, but genius has been taught to shine in works of fancy. The students are very numerous: the *Togati*, who alone are lodged in it, are about four hundred; these attend the lectures on the higher branches of learning: eight of them are packed together in one small room, but each has his separate bed. The younger scholars are near a thousand, but they only pass the hours of study here: these are six, three in the forenoon and three in the afternoon. As there are only four professors or teachers, nine of the *Togati* assist in teaching the younger scholars; for their trouble they receive a small *douceur* from the parents of those they teach: it is but a mean present, yet such as has in rude times formed the recompense of heroes: it is a—plate of victuals as an addition to their frugal repasts. The teachers receive a salary of about sixty pounds a year. I was invited by, I think, the head professor, to be present at the exercises of some of the *togati*. The one in which he chose they should exhibit before me was—psalm-singing: they were fine stout fellows, and roared lustily. The library was in unison with the rest of the establishment. I scarce saw any thing but classics, scholastic works, and musty books of divinity. It possessed two or three jaw-teeth of an elephant, and the head and horns of an elk. It is supposed they
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were found in the Theis. I would not so far deviate from common justice, as to relate, for anecdote sake, an ill-natured and false fact; but, if I am not much mistaken, it was here that a Course of History lasted so long, that after the professor had lectured *nine years, he was not advanced further than the middle ages.*"

Besides the college, Debretzin is famous for its soap manufactories, its bread, *Guba*, and pipes, and its quarterly fairs. These are the principal sources of the opulence of its inhabitants; but the vending of justice by the members of the *Districtual Court* must not be omitted in the accurate *Statistic* of the industry and sources of wealth of this town.

The soap is sent all over the kingdom, and even to foreign countries. It is made from natural Mineral Alkali or Natron; here called *Székő*. This is found as an efflorescence on a sandy soil in many parts of Hungary, but particularly about a lake near Kis-maria, which is but a few miles from Debretzin. It is not purified, nor does it undergo any alteration, but as it is scraped or brushed off the soil, it is used. The process of soap-boiling here is this:—The Natron is thrown into a large wooden vat sunk in the ground; upon this boiling water is poured; to this lixivium lime is added, and thus the lie is made, the sand and heterogeneous matter falling to the bottom. The other ingredient, fat, is melted as usual in a great copper-boiler very wide above; no *Axungia* is used. The lie is then added to the melted fat by pailfulls: as it boils up, the imperfect soap or mixture
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of fat and lie is ladled out into a neighbouring vat, and then fresh lie is added to what is in the boiler: now what was ladled out is put back again into the boiler: this is repeated several times. Whether this is only requisite on account of the relative smallness of the boilers or not, I dare not say, so much depends, in the common arts, on apparent trifles: towards the conclusion common salt is added by degrees. When the soap is sufficiently boiled, it is poured into parallelipedal wooden boxes or chests, lined on the inside with a strong linen cloth. The boxes are about a yard high, a yard long, and half a yard broad, and take to pieces. When the soap is quite cold, it is divided into four pieces, and then subdivided and laid by.

I gave myself a good deal of trouble to learn the proportions of the materials; but more from the ignorance of the boilers, than a desire of concealing their *mysteries*, I could obtain no exact *formula*; it seemed all guess-work. The following proportions given me by two different boilers, do not materially disagree:

Fat	-	7 cwt.	Fat	-	9 cwt.
Impure Natron		8 <i>kible</i>	Impure Natron		9 <i>kible</i>
Quick Lime		1½ cwt.	Quick Lime		1½ <i>kible</i>
Common Salt above		1 cwt.	Common Salt		1 cwt.

The *kible* is a measure containing about 8656 cubic inches.

The soap is white, and remarkably light and spongy; and some idea of the quantity fabricated may be formed from knowing that there are about seventy master boilers.

Lighter, whiter, and better flavoured bread than that made here I never ate; nor did I ever see elsewhere such large loaves. Were I not afraid of being accused of taking advantage of the privilege of travellers, I should say they were near half a yard cubed. As this bread is made without yeast, about which such a hue and cry is often raised, and with a substitute which is a dry mass, that may be easily transported, and kept half a year or more, I think it may be of use to my country, for me to detail the Debretzin art of making bread. The ferment is thus made: Two good handfulls of hops are boiled in four quarts of water; this is poured upon as much wheaten bran as can be well moistened by it; to this are added four or five pounds of leaven: when this is only warm, the mass is well worked together to mix the different parts. This mass is then put in a warm place for twenty-four hours, and after that it is divided into small pieces about the size of a hen's egg or a small orange, which are dried by being placed upon a board and exposed to a dry air, but not to the sun: when dry they are laid by for use, and may be kept half a year. This is the ferment, and it is to be used in the following manner: For a baking of six large loaves, six good handfulls of these balls are taken and dissolved in seven or eight quarts of warm water. This is poured through a sieve into one end of the bread-trough, and three quarts more

of warm water are poured through the sieve after it, and what remains in the sieve is well pressed out : this liquor is mixed up with so much flour as to form a mass of the size of a large loaf : this is strewed over with flour, the sieve with its contents is put upon it, and then the whole is covered up warm, and left till it has risen enough, and its surface has begun to crack : this forms the leaven. Then fifteen quarts of warm water, in which six handfulls of salt have been dissolved, are poured through the sieve upon it, and the necessary quantity of flour is added, and mixed and kneaded with the leaven ; this is covered up warm, and left for about an hour. It is then formed into loaves, which are kept in a warm room half an hour ; and after that they are put in the oven, where they remain two or three hours according to the size. The great advantage of this ferment is, that it may be made in great quantities at a time, and kept for use. Might it not on this account be useful on board of ships, and likewise for armies when in the field ?

Guba, as far as I know, is an article peculiar to Hungary, and here it is only made in a few places. It is very convenient for those whose occupations expose them to be out in inclement weather ; as shepherds and herdsmen. It may be fabricated wherever long-wooled sheep are bred : it exactly imitates a sheep's-skin. The chain, or warp, is about as thick as a small crow quill, and pretty fast spun. The woof, or weft, is on the contrary very loosely spun, and nearly as thick as one's little finger : this is wound on a piece of wood half a yard long, in the direction of its length : this is the

shuttle. Though the cloth is only a yard wide, two weavers work together on the same bench: no *temples* are used, and the loom has only two *treadles*. What is peculiar in this cloth is this; that after every four throws of the shuttle, that is after every fourth thread, a small lock of the long wool of the *Ovis Strepsiceros*, or Hungarian sheep, is put in with the fingers; it passes laterally over and under four threads of the warp: one end of the lock, and that is its base, only just comes out; but the other end is four or five inches long, and hangs down as on the sheep's back. Thus there is only one lock to four threads of the chain, and one row of locks to four threads of woof: but as the locks, which are put in by both weavers, are made to come out a thread of the warp more to the right after each throw of the shuttle, the whole cloth is equally covered by these locks. That this may be more easily understood; let it be supposed that 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24 represent the threads of the chain, and *a, b, c, d, e, f*, the locks; *a* goes over 1, under 2, over 3 and under 4, and then is brought out; *b* goes over 5, under 6, over 7, under 8, and then is brought out; *c* goes over 9, under 10, over 11, under 12, and then is brought out; so with *d*, which comes out at 16, and *e* at 20, and *f* at 24. This forms one row of locks; then succeed four throws of the shuttle, and another row of locks; but the first lock, or *a*, of this second row, goes over 2, under 3, over 4, under 5, and then is brought out; *b* likewise of this second row goes over 6, under 7, over 8, under 9, and then is brought out; *c* goes over 10, under 11, over 12, under 13, and then is brought out, and so on; *d* coming out

out at 17, *c* at 21, *f* at 25: then again four threads of woof, and another row of locks; here *a* comes out at 6, *b* at 10, *c* at 14, *d* at 18, and so on. After the guba is wove, it is sent to Groß Wardein to be washed in the hot-springs there, and this, I believe, is all the milling it has: it is then dyed, and generally black: it is only worn by the common people, and costs about half-a-guinea, made into *matelots*, or loose great-coats. A finer sort is made from the wool of lambs or young sheep: these are dyed blue, look very well, and are very good for winter use instead of furs: they cost thrice as much as the common sort.

Just out of town there is an Imperial Saltpetre manufactory. This salt is not produced by an artificial composition of vegetable and animal substances, but soil from the neighbourhood is collected and formed into stacks or heaps twenty feet long, six feet high and six feet thick, but smaller at top than at bottom: of these there are a good many. As the saltpetre appears on the surface, it is scraped or brushed off with the soil, and thrown into tubs with straw at the bottom, and provided with a spicket and fossel. Water is then poured on, which dissolves the saline matter, and, percolating slowly through the straw, runs out, and is received into a general receiver. Of these tubs there are a great many. This lixivium is poured upon fresh materials, till it is sufficiently impregnated; it is then evaporated, crystallized, and purified as in other manufactories. The director was a German. But the purification of what is received from the
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small manufactories, such as those I met with between Erlau and Hedwig, is the principal concern. Of about 1000 cwt. which is annually sent from hence to the Imperial magazine at Cashaw, 200 cwt. is only produced here; the remainder is received in the impure state, and is only purified. These small manufacturers receive for it in this state; for one sort eight-and-thirty shillings, and for another sort six-and-forty shillings the cwt.

Horned cattle are another principal source of riches to this town. Mr. Korabinsky mentions in his Lexicon, as a proof of the greatness of its herds, that a certain Biró is said often to have driven ten thousand head of cattle upon the neighbouring common; and that in the year 1739, when on account of the severity and length of the winter a scarcity of fodder prevailed, and it was requisite to slaughter more than eight thousand head, they were never missed.

The four annual fairs bring hither a great number of strangers, and many more are brought by law-suits in the *Districtual* Court of Justice held here, of which there are only four in the kingdom. Before this Court the civil causes of the nobility are pleaded. Its members have the vile practice of receiving *incidents*. Are these bribes? the reader will ask. God forbid! They are *only douceurs*, to engage the Judges, or the *Referendaries*, to examine more *strictly* into the nature of a cause. These *incidents*, for I would not call them bribes for the world, form the greater part of the incomes of the members of this court.

court. And the courts of law at Buda are not less venal; and as the causes which come before them are of greater importance, their incidents are greater.

Nothing surprised me more in France, than to see in the parliament towns the litigating parties, with letters of introduction and recommendation in their hands, pay their court to *Monsieur Le Premier President* and his associates, and this not secretly, but openly, as complying with a received custom. If, where justice is impartially distributed, the losing party attributes but too often its misfortune, not to the badness of its cause, but to the defects of the law, and the partiality of the judges; what must be its sentiments here, and how great its vexation, where the ministers of justice are sued for judgments with money in their hands! I hardly know what sum to give as the fixed salary of these judges; I find eighty pounds a year noted down in my journal, and eighty pounds at Debretzin is not so small a sum as it is at London; but Mr. Keresztury in his *Introductio*, &c. whose accuracy I cannot doubt, gives 250l. as the salary of the president, 150l. as that of the first assessor, 120l. for each of the nine assessors, and 80l. for the secretaries. This was according to the regulations of Joseph the Second; but whether these salaries have been continued whilst the rest of this sovereign's regulations in law matters have been laid aside, I cannot say.

I was a good deal surprised to find in this very distant country

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four or five gentlemen who had visited our island: one or two of the professors had been there. It is a custom for the Calvinist ministers to make a tour to a protestant country; some go to Holland, some to Switzerland, and others to Great Britain. Pastor Benedict is well acquainted with the language of the gypsies, or, as they are called in Hungary, Ziguiners; he assured me that when he was in England, he conversed with some English gypsies who understood him very well. Dr. Vesprim, the oldest physician in the town, studied some time I think at Edinburgh.

Debretzin has a tolerably good inn. Travellers in this country often carry about with them their own feather-beds, &c. and the innkeepers find only the bedsteads: this probably was a custom formerly in Germany; for at this day, in some parts of it, a large leather *valise* or portmanteau is called a *bettfack*. Just without the town there are a few vineyards, but they yield a very poor wine. This is the last place where I would fix my residence; a deep Calvinistic gloom pervades every thing, and the dull rainy weather which happened during my two or three days' stay here added considerably to it. For water the inhabitants are obliged to go near a quarter of a mile, and they have no stone nearer than Gros Wardein or Tokay.