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978-1-108-04532-2 - Travels from Vienna through Lower Hungary: With Some Remarks on the State of Vienna During the Congress in the Year 1814

Richard Bright

Excerpt

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TRAVELS

IN

LOWER HUNGARY.

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CHAPTER I.

Vienna. — The Redoute. — Congress. — Carrousel. — Court. — Imperial Hunt. — Private Entertainments. — Evening Amusements. — Dinner Parties. — Theatres. — Tableaux. — The Prater, and other places of public resort. — A party on sledges. — Festivals of the church. — Holy-week. — Death of the Marshal Prince de Ligne. — Empress Maria Louisa. — Prince of Parma. — Uncertainty in intelligence of the negotiations. — The Imperial Vault.

I HAD already passed several months in Holland, and different parts of Germany, when the expected dissolution of the congress, which had assembled at Vienna in the autumn of 1814,

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induced me to hasten towards that capital; since I was naturally anxious to become a spectator of this most extraordinary assemblage. At Dresden, I was assured that the whole was already brought to a close, and was thus induced to remain quietly for some weeks. When I had advanced as far as Prague, I was hurried on by the report that a few days still remained; during my approach to Vienna, the account changed at every town, and, on entering the capital in the latter end of November, we were told that the congress would certainly continue for weeks, and probably for months; in short, that no one could foresee its termination.

I soon procured a lodging in a busy and dirty inn in the commercial part of the city, which was much frequented by Greeks, Armenians, and Eastern merchants. It was built in the form of a hollow square; the communication between the rooms was by open galleries; and the internal space into which they looked was crowded with tilted waggons, shattered calashes, and other swinging and springless machines, which will not submit themselves to the English nomenclature.

My apartment was large and desolate, without a carpet, but provided with an earthen stove in one corner, and a little wooden bed-stead in another. Such are the miserable accommodations in most of the inns at Vienna. The windows, however, which were double, looked into a busy street, lying in the direct line between the gayer parts of the town, and the great public drive called the Prater, and, as it was at an hour when many carriages were rolling towards that spot, the scene was lively, and put me more in mind of London than any thing I had before seen in Germany. Many of the equipages were handsome, well attended by servants, and kept with care. After some time, I walked into the streets,—a service of danger; for most of them are narrow, and the sides, which are paved with flat square stones for the convenience of

walking, and are, on that account, greatly praised throughout the whole empire, are so little elevated above the carriage tract, that the foot passenger has no safety but in the judgment of the charioteer, who frequently risks an encounter with your feet, rather than with the wheels of a passing carriage. The coachmen, however, give some warning of their approach, by a species of unintelligible roar, a little in accent like the language in which a Lancashire carter converses with his team; but not less peremptory than the rapid “by your leave” of a Bath chairman. When, by courage or good luck, I could snatch an opportunity to cast a look upwards, I observed that many of the houses were large, and handsomely built, and all of them very high; but, owing to the narrowness of the streets, there is a prevailing gloom, and it is only in a few of the more open parts that the real beauty of the buildings can develop itself. The shops display a considerable variety of goods, though frequently a square glazed case of patterns hanging at the door is the only mark by which the nature of the shopkeeper’s dealings is indicated. Besides this, a small board, projecting into the street from above each door, bears some painted sign, as the Golden Fleece, the Sceptre, the Schwartzenburg Head, or the Holy Ghost.

It may not, perhaps, be improper, thus early in my narrative, to introduce a slight description of the general situation and character of this city. Stating, at the same time, a few of the principal events which have had an influence over its external state and appearance, as they have forwarded or retarded its internal prosperity.

The city of Vienna is situated on a plain where the Danube divides itself into several branches, upon the southernmost of which the capital is built. It consists of two parts perfectly distinct. The city, properly so called, is surrounded by walls, bastions, and a dry fosse, forming a complete fortification;

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and the suburbs, which are surrounded by a line of circumvallation, with barriers at all the openings, and are separated from the city by the *Glacis*, and an intervening space entirely free from buildings. The circuit of the inner fortification is less than three miles, whilst that of the external *lines* exceeds twelve; including in this the line of the works, which occupies about two-thirds of the whole, and the natural line, formed by the branch of the Danube, which, touching at one part of the walls of the city, may be considered as forming one-third of the surrounding line of defence. A part of the suburbs is cut off by this branch of the river, being situated on the opposite side, and occupying part of a large island, formed by the divided stream. The whole population of this capital amounts to about 270,000, of which 200,000 reside in the extensive suburbs.

The history of this city, situated almost upon the eastern confines of Germany, is crowded with eventful periods. It had been for many years a station of the Roman legions, and had afterwards successively fallen into the hands of the Goths and of the Huns, when Charlemagne in 791 attached it to the empire of the Franks. At this time, however, the walls included but a comparatively small space, and, when the church of St Stephen, which now stands nearly in the centre of the city, was built in 1144, by the margrave Henry II., it was without the walls. Under a succession of margraves and of dukes, the city was gradually improved by public buildings, and institutions; and by fortifications, added or strengthened, according to the urgency of domestic and foreign danger. It was during this period, in the year 1365, that the Duke Rudolph IV. founded the university to which Maria Theresa, four centuries afterwards, gave its present form and importance. In 1484, Vienna sustained with courage, but without success, a siege by the Hungarians, under their king Mathias, who,

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from that time, took up his residence in the city. On his death, however, the Emperor Maximilian was received as Archduke, since which Vienna has always been the residence of the Austrian Court. In 1529, the inhabitants, to defend themselves against the Turks; who, taking advantage of the disturbed state of Hungary, had carried their arms into Austria; were compelled to destroy the whole suburbs by fire, and to repair the imperfect fortifications with all possible activity, and by these means were enabled, after suffering a siege of three weeks, to force the enemy to retire. In consequence of the warning which they received from this attack, the city was surrounded by the regular fortifications and walls, which still exist in many parts quite uninjured. In the year 1683, the Turks were again induced by the Hungarians to undertake the siege of Vienna, with a large army under the command of the vizier in person. The commandant of the town a second time destroyed the whole of the suburbs, and for two months maintained the city, when, other forces coming to the assistance of Vienna, the Turks again retired. The fortifications were then repaired, and the suburbs rebuilt; and, in 1704, the lines of circumvallation were formed, to protect them from the incursions of the Hungarians, who were again agitated by revolt. From this time, under the successive reigns of Joseph I., of Charles IV., of Maria Theresa, of Joseph II., and the short reign of Leopold II., the public edifices and institutions of Vienna were greatly improved. In 1792, the present emperor succeeded, amidst the unpropitious omens of the French Revolution. In 1797, Vienna was again threatened with siege by the victorious armies of France returning from Italy,—a danger which was averted by the treaty signed at Leoben. In 1805, however, on the breaking out of a new French war, the enemy was suffered quietly to take possession of Vienna, on the 13th of No-

vember. After remaining in the city for a month, the French troops withdrew, and Napoleon, having returned his thanks to the inhabitants for their loyal attachment to his person, entered the city in triumph. In 1809, war again broke out between Austria and France. After the battles fought from the 18th to the 22d of April, by Napoleon and the Archduke Charles, in the neighbourhood of Ratisbon, the enemy set themselves in march towards Vienna. The town prepared for siege. The French took possession of the suburbs without experiencing any resistance; and the Emperor Napoleon, on the 9th of May, fixed his head-quarters at the palace of Schönbrun. On the 11th, at nine o'clock in the evening, the bombardment of the city commenced furiously in one part, while an attack was at the same time made upon another. Before three in the morning a capitulation was offered, and Marshal Oudinot had taken possession of the town before nine. Subsequently to this, the well-known battles of Wagram and of Asperne took place, and concluded in the armistice of July the 12th, and in the peace signed at Schönbrun on the 14th of October. The French immediately began to destroy the fortifications of Vienna; and, before they left it, had made such extensive breaches, that their repair would require an immense labour and expence. The Austrians have at length perceived the impossibility of defending a town which is commanded by its suburbs, and justly feeling the calamities to which the inhabitants of a fortified place are often exposed, have resolved not to repair the walls, and are now busily employed in pulling down several parts, in order to facilitate the approaches to the town. The events which followed the French campaign of 1809 in such rapid succession, and which finally gave rise to the general congress assembled at Vienna, are too fresh in the memory of every one to require any detail.

On this short sketch of some of the prominent features in the history of Vienna, it is by no means my intention to ingraft a political discussion; it is introduced simply with the view of leading the reader to form correct ideas of the present state of the Austrian capital. He will at once form to himself the picture of antiquated buildings piled up in successive stories, and of streets narrowed to the utmost by the trembling people who sought protection within the walls; and he will anticipate a town irregularly constructed by frequent additions, yet ornamented by many substantial public edifices, arising under the comparatively quiet and peaceful reigns which preceded that of the present monarch. In the suburbs he will look for a more regular and open plan of building,—for houses less elevated,—for gardens and places of recreation,—for the work-yards of artificers,—and the seat of many manufactures;—and all this he will find. In fact, the city of Vienna and its suburbs, as it relates to the elevation of the buildings, approaches somewhat to the figure of a cone, of which the apex is formed by the steeple of St Stephen's church, and the circumference of the basis by the external lines of fortification. The largest, highest, and best houses of the suburbs, are generally built in those parts which face towards the city, where are seen several fine streets, palaces of the nobility, and public institutions. The glacis, and the area which is always preserved free from buildings, is nearly a quarter of a mile in width, and is a most valuable means of securing the health of the inhabitants.

My first walk was short; and at an early hour I retired to the box, for it deserves no better name, which was destined to receive my weary limbs. From this I was roused in the morning by a succession of visitors; one presented himself as a chiropodist, another was a barber; a woman came to supply

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me with tooth-brushes and trinkets ; a turbaned figure had beautiful amber mouth-pieces for tobacco-pipes ; and another excellent meerschaum tobacco-pipe heads. Having dismissed all my company, too little satisfied to induce them to repeat their visits, I had my breakfast, consisting, as is usual in Germany, of a jug of hot scalded milk, and another of coffee.

It was Sunday ; the shops were all closed, and, in addition to the mass, which is daily and almost hourly celebrated in all the churches, sermons were preached in the German language. It is a day of more than ordinary festivity amongst all ranks ; the theatres are open in the evening ; and I was strongly recommended to visit a place of public amusement called the Redoute, where, in all probability, I should see many of the distinguished persons then collected at the Congress.

Not having yet delivered my letters, I accompanied a gentleman of Vienna, with whom I had made an accidental acquaintance. We entered the room about nine o'clock in the evening. It is a magnificent saloon, finely lighted, surrounded by a gallery, and forming a part of the large pile of building called the Bourg or Imperial Palace. Never was an assembly less ceremonious ; every one wore his hat ; many, till the room became heated, their great-coats ; and no one pretended to appear in an evening dress, except a few Englishmen, who, from the habits of our country, and some little vanity, generally attempt to distinguish themselves by an attention to outward appearance. Around the whole circumference of the room were four or five rows of benches, occupied, for the most part, by well-dressed females ; while the other parts presented a moving multitude, many of whom were in masks, or in dominos, and were busily engaged in talking and laughing, or dancing to the music of a powerful orchestra. My companion squeezed my arm, as we passed a thin figure with sallow shrunken features,