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978-1-108-06099-8 - Through Bosnia and the Herzegovina on Foot during the Insurrection: August and September 1875: With an Historical Review of Bosnia, and a Glimpse at the Croats, Slavonians, and the Ancient Republic of Ragusa

Arthur John Evans

Excerpt

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BOSNIA AND THE HERZEGOVINA.

CHAPTER I

AGRAM AND THE CROATS.

Slovenization in Styria—Regrets of a Prussian—Agram—Her Slavonic Features, Hero, Art, and Architecture—Flowers of the Market-place—Croatian Costume—Prehistoric Ornament and Influence of Oriental Art—South Slavonic Crockery, Jewelry, and Musical Instruments—Heirlooms from Trajan or Heraclius?—Venice and Croatia—Croatian Gift of Tongues—Lost in the Forest—A Bulgarian Colony—On to Carlovatz—The Welsh of Croatia—Croatian Characteristics—Carlovatz Fair—On the Outposts of Christendom.

As the train from Vienna descends into the valley of the Drave a change becomes perceptible in the scattered cottages and hamlets that fly past us. The dark wooden chalets of the Semmering valleys, that recall Salzburg and Tyrol and more distant Scandinavia, give place to meaner huts, less roomy, lower, paler, more rectangular. Rich maroon-brown beams that seem to have grown up with the pines around, dark projecting eaves that overhang the time-stained fronts as the shadowy fir-branches the primeval trunks—all these give place to wattle and daub and chilling whitewash. The eaves are now less prominent; but if the houses are comparatively browless, there is a pair of window eyelets under the triliteral gable, and their physiognomy is recognised at once. These are the

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huts you have seen far away on Slavonic outskirts of Hungary. You have seen them dotted about Bohemia and the sandy plains of Prussia; you have seen them magnified and embellished into the old palaces of Prague. As we approach Marburg we are entering in truth on another world—a Slavonic tongue begins to be heard around. Those mountain-chalets were the high water mark of the Germanic sea.

For the tide has turned. Marburg, a few years ago reckoned a German town, is now almost entirely Slovenized. The tradesmen—nay, the well to-do classes themselves—speak Slovene in preference to German. A fellow-traveller told me that since the Austro-Prussian war Slovene instead of German had become the language of the schools. Cut off from her German aspirations, the Austrian Government has seen the necessity of making friends with the Slavonic Mammon; and, as she distrusts those members of the race who, like the Czechs and Croats, cherish memories of independent kingship, her statesmen have cast about them for a Slavonic race free from any misguiding ‘Kronen-tradition,’ and have consequently been exalting the horn of the Slovenes who inhabit Southern Styria and parts of Carinthia and Carniola at the expense of the Germans of the towns, and partly even of the Carniolan Wends, whose language is akin to the Slovene. The painful impression produced by this turn of the tables on the Germans—who look on Austria as a mere warming-pan for themselves in Eastern Europe—is amusingly betrayed by a recent Prussian traveller, Maurer, who visited Marburg in 1870. ‘Another ten years,’ says he, ‘and Marburg will be as Slovenish as its immediate surroundings. . . . It was extremely painful to me (äusserst

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peinlich) to see the children at Steinbrück going to or coming from school with books in which the text and objects were Slovene; although these little ones, even the smallest of them, had our language at their fingers' end so completely that they seemed never to have spoken any other. . . . We must not spare ourselves the realisation of the bitter truth that the greater part of Styria and Carinthia, and the whole of Carniola, Gorizia, Gradisca, and Istria, with the avenue to the Adriatic, are lost to us. Even supposing the whole of Southern Germany to have been fused with Northern, and the German element in Austria either under compulsion or of its free will to have followed the already torn away Bohemia and Moravia'—(the Berliner looks on the annexation of the Czech kingdom as a mere work of time!)—'even then we should have neither the might nor the right—though it matters less about the right (!)—to break forcibly through Illyria to the Adriatic. And yet our dreaminess and disregard of the facts before us made us look on Trieste and these former lands of the German Bund as our inheritance.'¹—these poor Prussians!

But the Slovenes are left behind—as the train hurries along the willowed valley of the Save we find ourselves among a population less European in its dress, and soon arrive at Agram, the capital of Croatia, where we discover a fair hotel in the High Street. The aspect of the town at once strikes the stranger as other than German. What are these long, low, rectangular houses but slightly enlarged reproductions of the Slavonic cottage? Here is the same pervading pallor, the twin eyelet windows,

¹ Franz Maurer, 'Reise durch Bosnien die Saveländer und Ungarn.' Berlin, 1870, p. 45.

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circular here, and pierced in the trilateral gables like owl-holes in an old barn. The gables themselves—more modest than the generality of those in Teutonic towns—seem to shrink from facing the street. Outside some of the older houses is to be seen a wooden gallery, festooned perhaps with flowers and creepers, on to which the room-doors open—it strikes one as an approach to the Turkish verandah, the *Divanhané*. The



Croatian Clothes-shop, Agram.

headings over the shops are almost entirely Slavonic. Brilliant, quite Oriental, are the stores where the gay Croatian costumes are hung out to tempt the passing peasant. Picturesque are the windows, shut in by foliated bars and gratings of efflorescent ironwork; strange, too, the doors and shutters, crossed diagonally by iron

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bars of really artistic merit, decked at the point of intersection by a heraldic rose, and the limbs of the Maltese cross terminating in graceful fleurs-de-lys. Not that the object of all these is primarily ornament. These quadruple bolts and locks, these massive hinges and the holdfasts by them inside, which fit into sockets as in our safes, and so prevent the door from being burst open by hacking through the hinges from without—all these tell a different story. They speak of times when the streets of Agram were not so secure as at present.

On an eminence rises the cathedral and spacious palace of the bishop, enclosed, like so many churches of Slavonic lands, in old walls with round, cone-peaked towers—a southern Kremlin. Just below it is the market-place, and in its centre the equestrian statue of the national hero, the Ban Jellachitj, the poet-warrior who in the days of the Magyar revolution led his Croats against their national enemy, and saved the Austrian police-state when its fortunes were at their lowest ebb. He is dressed in the picturesque hussar uniform of his country, with flowing mantle and high-plumed cap, riding northwards on his pedestal, and pointing his sword forwards towards the scenes of his triumphs over the Magyars.

The town is divided into three parts, the lower town in which is the market-place and main street, the height on which the cathedral stands, and the upper town on which rise many large houses inhabited by the resident bureaucracy, where is the Diet-hall, the Ban's house and the Museum, and looking down from whose airy terraces you see the lower town stretched out like a straggling village below you, and are reminded of the view of Buda

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from its Acropolis. The cathedral, in spite of its bulwark of fortifications, has suffered much from the Turks, who destroyed it, they say, three times; and inside from its own bishops, who have defaced the gothic nave and aisles with whitewash and monstrous Jesuitic shrines. Its exterior is, however, still partly fretted with old stone panel work, which recalls the Tudor ornamentation on the schools of Oxford. From the top of the square tower expands a beautiful panorama—the silvery Save and its rich valley—the distant Bosnian mountains fading into the blue sky; and in the other direction the dark forest-covered heights of the Slema Vrh, which have given Agram her Slavonic name Zagreb—‘beyond the rocks.’ Except the cathedral, and the finely-carved façade of the Marcus church, there are no buildings of beauty or interest. The Ban’s residence was so completely devoid of architectural pretensions, and so indistinguishable from the houses round, that we should not have noticed it, but for a large black flag thrust forth from one of its windows in honour of old Kaiser Ferdinand the ‘good-natured.’ As is too generally the case in Hungary, the people of Agram are far behind in æsthetic culture; the pictures in the Academy here are few and curiously bad, and the one good painting was not by a native, but a Czech artist. The Agramers, however, seem to have the good taste to appreciate this, and photographic copies are to be seen in the shop windows; rather, perhaps, owing to South Slavonic patriotism, than to respect for high art. The picture represents the funeral of a Montenegrine Voivode or leader, whose body is being borne along a gloomy mountain gorge from the battle-field; and the grandeur of the lifeless hero, the dark, almost Italian

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look of the weeping clanspeople, are executed with great fidelity to Czernagoran nature.

But living pictures, more artistic than the bronze statue of the Ban, more graceful than the weeping Montenegrines, are around us here. The market place is a spacious studio. The beauty of the Croatian peasant costume is almost unique in Europe—possibly only rivalled at Belgrade. Seen from above, when the market-place is thronged, it looks almost like a bed of red and white geraniums; it is these prevailing colours which give the peasant groups a lightness and brilliancy which I have seen nowhere else. What is remarkable is, that this brightness should be shared in such equal proportions by men and women alike. In Serbia—even in Turkey—the men are not so gay. The head-dress of the Serbian women is perhaps at times more elegant—the colours of their dress are often more varied; but what, after all, is a nosegay without a sufficiency of white flowers? In the Agram market-place, not only the colours, but the very materials, might have been chosen by an artist. What, indeed, is the tissue of these diaphanous chemises and undulating kerchiefs, but the mull muslin of our lay-figures? The women are, moreover, possessed of such a faculty for throwing themselves into picturesque attitudes that one would think they had a drop of Gipsy blood in their veins. In such drapery, with such instincts, such taste in colours, what need have they of novel modes?—they who have not yet improved away their form by cuirasses of millinery—they who have none of the heavy shrouds of colder climes to muffle them—whose simple fashions every breath of wind has an art to change! The faces, too, are rarely vulgar; these are not the coarse

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hoydens of a North-German market-place — on their features, in their demeanour, one would fancy that many of them have inherited the refinements of an older civilisation ; some soft Italian element, come perhaps by way of Venice, descended perhaps from the old Roman cities of these parts.

The head-dresses of these village ladies are varied, for every hamlet has its speciality of costume. On some, from St. Ivan, the transparent white kerchief falls about the bust and shoulders lightly as a bridal veil ; on others it takes a rosier hue, and is known as the *Rubatz*. On others, again, as those from Zagoria—who will have it that they are great grand-daughters of Avars—it is drawn backwards over a long silver pin, stuck horizontally across the hair, and depends over the back till its variegated border and long fringe sweep the girdle. Seen from the front this coiffure recalls that of the *Contadine* of the Romagna. In the summer months these peasants rarely put on their fur-fringed mantles, which resemble those of Serb and Slavonian ; sometimes they wear a scarcely perceptible vest, but usually the sole covering of arms and torso is simply a light homespun tunic with loose flowing sleeves confined towards the wrist and then expanding again. In place of a skirt they generally wear two wide overlapping aprons, one before and one behind, which in a gale of wind may afford occasional studies for a Bacchante ! and over the front one of these hangs a narrower apron starred with red asterisks, crossed by little zigzagging patterns, or by light transversal bands of rose and lilac. But enough of such pallid hues ! The pride of their toilette is a brilliant crimson scarf, the *Pojas*, wound round the waist, some of the folds of which

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are at times loosened and hang down over the front apron in a graceful sling or outside pouch. Nor does a single kirtle content them, magnificent as this is. Amongst all the Illyrian Slaves, south as well as north of the Save, I have noticed this peculiarity, that they wear the two kirtles of classic antiquity. Besides this zone round



Croat Woman in the Agram Market.

the waist a bright scarlet fillet—the *Strophion* of ancient nymphs and goddesses—is wound just below the bosom, and is fastened with a bow in front as on the *Thalia* or *Euterpe* of the Vatican.

Round their necks hangs an array of what politeness would have me call coral necklaces. Occasionally they

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wear silver ear-rings, silver pendants on their breast, and rings on their fingers; but of gold and silver jewelry they possess less than their neighbours beyond the Save; the reason of this being the general absence of specie in the country, which prevents them from studding their hair and tunic with glittering coins—a habit which in Serbia alone withdraws some three-quarters of a million from the currency. Many of them, especially the girls, divide their hair into two long plaits, the ends of which they tie up with brilliant ribbons; for the twin pigtails of maidenhood are far more characteristically Slave than German, and may be traced among the Russians far away to the White Sea—indeed, this may well be one of the tokens which betrays the Slavonic origin of so many soi-disants Germans. For boots the Croat ladies either wear a curious kind of sandal called *Opanka*, common to the men as well throughout the whole Illyrian triangle, and not unlike the ancient Egyptian, made of gay leather, red and yellow; or, must it be confessed?—they sometimes buskin themselves in high-heeled Wellingtons! and though their aprons—one cannot conscientiously speak of skirts—do not reach much below the knees, these martial casings can hardly be looked on as a concession to prudery, for after all they generally prefer to go about with feet and ankles in the most graceful costume of all—that of Eden!

To mention such very gorgeous gentlemen after the ladies really seems to require some apology. Imagine some exotic insect—how else can the subject be approached?—with forewings of dazzling gauzy white and underwings of scarlet. The white tunic expands like wings about the arms, and flutters from them in folds of