

A REMARKABLE VILLAGE

The Communal Possession of Land means An Entire Absence of Poverty, No Crime, No Police, No Prison

Quite near to Brasso, in the south-east of Hungary, the forest-clad and highly picturesque Carpathians attain the altitude of nearly 4,000 feet, and constitute a natural frontier between Hungary and Roumania.

From the main range various spurs extend northward. One of these spurs, in its course, makes a great ridge, to which has been given the name of Feketehalom, or the Black Hill. At its foot, embowered in trees and almost invisible when approached from the plain, lies a village of 5,000 inhabitants, which has been named after the hill, and in German is known as Zeiden. Only the Hungarian name—Feketehalom—appears at the railway station and in the railway time-tables.

It is one of a group of villages in the county of Brasso, now occupied by the descendants of Saxons who settled there many centuries ago. These villages are remarkable because of their general prosperity and the entire absence of poverty, due to the communal possession of much land and other property.

The village consists principally of two long streets, curving parallel to the mountain. These are generally about ninety feet wide; some are bordered by trees, and in one a clear stream flows rapidly down the centre. Electric standards show that they are well lit after dark.

The fifteen hundred houses constituting the village are of the one-story bungalow type, with the gable ends facing the road, and each is connected with the other by an archway of stone or concrete of sufficient size to admit the passage of wagons into the yards, in which are the necessary outbuildings.

About the middle of its length, one of the broad thoroughfares widens into a large market place, around which stand the ancient church and the still more ancient bell-tower, the public offices, bank, school, barracks, post and telegraph office, telephone exchange, hotel and theatre, all of which are the absolute property of the community.

From the market place another street leads to the forest on the mountain slope, in which are the swimming bath, dancing pavilion, restaurant, sawmills, stone quarry, water-works, and other communal property. The actual cost of all these buildings and works was close on £60,000, exclusive of the value of the land.

Then, just beyond the inhabited area are well-built stables for the horses, oxen, and other animals for breeding purposes, which cost the community £12,500 more.

At intervals along the main streets are large and strong cement troughs, constantly full of water, for the benefit of the individually-owned cattle which twice daily go to and from the common pasturage, presenting a very picturesque scene.

At break of day, all through the summer, the principal herdsman sounds his horn at one end of the village, and, in response, one, two, or more cows slowly move out of each gateway, and turn toward the grazing ground. Up the broad street the herdsman goes, and his followers increase until there is a procession of more than a thousand cattle. Another man brings up the rear, and quickens the movements of laggards by cracks of his long whip.

After a short interval a horn of different tone is sounded, and the street is soon alive with buffaloes of Asiatic type, which, as they hear the familiar note, emerge from their respective homes. These black and shaggy animals are almost as numerous as the oxen which have preceded them.

When both herds have disappeared there are many indications in the road that cattle have passed along. But so excellent are the arrangements for the preservation of cleanliness that, in less than two hours, all traces are removed. This and other useful work is done by gypsies, who form a small colony outside the village bounds.