



This picture depicts the first Oktoberfest celebration in 1810. But those first Oktoberfest beers weren't subject to the purity law that their 20th century brewers so proudly proclaimed.

brandy are harmless little helpers—even chalk is recommended. But then it gets beastly: cooked fishbladder helps to solve haze problems and for a beer where fermentation does not stop, some cooked calf-feet, added in form of a jelly, should do marvels.

A Mr. Zimmermann wrote a very comprehensive book in 1842 named, "The Textbook of the Beer Brewery," the second edition printed in Berlin in 1852. This is a first approach to a real textbook. Besides the traditional raw materials we find detailed chapters on clearing aids, for example Irish moss or, once again, fishbladder. A larger chapter deals with "Botanical excerpts as useful for the brewing trade." Included are gentian root, bitter clover, yarrow, vermouth, juniper and 25 other plants and herbs. Furthermore there are chapters titled, "Syrup from starch as a substitute for malt," recipes for a "champagne beer" or an unhopped "Broyhan-beer." Finally the author totally turns off the path of Reinheitsgebot: the last part, over 50 pages, deals exclusively with potato beer, otherwise very traditional but with potatoes instead of malt.

And this only 19 years before the Reinheitsgebot was introduced in the German Reich! From then on it went uphill with the purity of the German beer; the task was to be ahead of the English and other beer-exporting countries. From 1906 the Reinheitsgebot was the law in the whole of Ger-

many. The Weimar Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany, after World War II, also adopted it each in convenient versions. In the 20th century the Reinheitsgebot was never seriously questioned in Germany, for obvious reasons. Diversity declined, but as long as competition from abroad had to stay outside it didn't matter. German textbooks of the 20th century draw a sharp line between "permitted" and "not-permitted" ingredients. Knowledge alone of the "not-permitted" is not a crime, is it?

The German brewers over the years have learned to arrange themselves within the limits of the Reinheitsgebot with technical or economical necessities. But still sometimes it has a hypocritical taste. For example, in the discussion on how to add acid to wort and mash, brewers came to a very fast agreement as to how to produce lactic acid according to the Reinheitsgebot. This is done by fermenting wort with lactic acid bacteria to create a strongly acidic "beer" that can then be added to the mash or wort for acidification purposes.

Summary

The motivation behind the various editions of the Reinheitsgebot hasn't changed much over the years. In the first instance it was used to eliminate competition and helped gain bigger profits, no matter if for the brew-



The castle brewery at Kaltenberg inspires romantic brewing notions.

ers or the rulers. Often the brewers had to be protected from themselves. But to imply that the late-medieval rulers acted consumer-consciously or intended to support public health is as ridiculous as the statement that a bottle of Corona or American Budweiser would be deleterious to health simply because of its content of corn or rice.

At the end of the day good skills, knowledge and good raw materials, whether barley, corn or rice, are more valuable than purity laws. Almost every brewery in the world can, within the means of Reinheitsgebot, brew an awful beer; and most breweries could brew a good one without Reinheitsgebot. The Reinheitsgebot has always been used as a tool by German brewers if there was an opportunity to do so. They observed it only if there was no other choice. But there also are exceptions from the rule. And on these exceptions I will now have a beer—but a pure one, of course!

Guenther Thoemmes was raised and brewery-trained in the beer town of Bitburg. After more than 10 years as a global traveler in the beer business, he has drunk plenty of good beers brewed according to the Reinheitsgebot and many good ones brewed not according to it. He is married and lives in Vienna, Austria. Personal favorites are the incomparable Sierra Nevada Pale Ale, a nice draft Czech Budweiser, a fresh Paulaner Wheat and, of course, a cool Bittburger. Contact him at thoemmi@GMX.de. ☺