

BABIES AS EVIDENCE OF SPRINGTIME

Alma Rogers Writes From Vienna About Them, Together With Stories of Francis Richter, Vagaries of Language and Russian Music



A diensman is a messenger or guide licensed by the city. He wears his number on his coat and has a regular station on the street. The society of diensmen is responsible for the conduct of its members.

SPRING is at hand. This discovery was not made from our fifth-floor court Wohnung (dwelling), where all that is visible of the outside world is a gray patch of sky and the top of a church steeple. Though one must regard only the upward vision, nor ever voluntarily look below into the brick-paved courtyard that is like a prison wall and whose windows are stuffed with the bedding of the tenants ailing. It was not the message of a scudding cloud or a greener hue on the old church steeple that told me.

It was the babies. They are coming out simultaneously with the young leaves on the trees. All Winter long they have been stowed away—heaven knows how—in the dark and comfortless Wohnungen in which the true Viennese are born, live and begin their funerals.

At intervals I have observed a white bundle, stiff as a popose board, in the arms of a gaily arrayed maid, and supposed it was a baby. But the bundles were always so silent and motionless I was never quite sure if babies could survive the conditions of life in Vienna until one sunny afternoon about two weeks ago, when walking along the Stadt Park. Then they burst upon me as suddenly as the slight of the yellowing catkins on the trees and the swelling buds of lilacs. Quantities of them, on the wide pavement, and the graveled park paths; mewling infants in carts with fuzzy little curls sticking out from cap borders and eyes wide open to a new world; past the creeping stage, these being proud to go on their own legs; others who would soon be out of arms altogether, having attained to the dignity of trousers and other sexed garments. And all of them, irrespective of age or dignity, in charge of the omnipresent nursemaid.

In America a nursemaid is just a nursemaid, being nothing particular to look at unless endowed with the good looks which heaven, for reasons of its own, dispenses irrespective of station. But here she is not only a nursemaid, she is a picturesque figure. So picturesque, in fact, that she appeals to the artist eye, and hence one must be excused for turning back to look at her.

Not for her face—she is nearly always old and unbecomingly so for her costume. Upon her head a gorgeous handkerchief is folded with caplike effect in front, the ends free in the back. A bright green, red or blue embroidered jacket is worn over a white bodice. The skirt is short and usually dark, made yards and yards wide and plaited in the fashion. Strips of rainbow-hued embroidery, about two inches wide, hang down behind from the waist for garniture. Stockings of orange colored yarn, knit on old-fashioned needles, cover her legs. She wears shoes now often than the high boots of the true peasant, which shows the insidiousness of the modern spirit.

Next to the bizarre and yet pleasing combination of color, the most astonishing thing about her is her hip measure. It is truly Falstaffian. Yet not so, for it is artificial. Black bread, not being conducive to girth, she acquires it by petticoats, accordion pleated and piled on until in her own native Hungary she looks, on state occasions, like a ballet dancer. A wealthy peasant girl there will wear as many as a hundred such, of the finest silk, and her toilet will cost so much as a modern gown that disposes its superfluous material lengthwise instead of horizontally. But such a one does not come to take care of babies in Wien. The nursemaids are more modest in their devotion to the mode, half a dozen petticoats, as I should judge, being sufficient.

Of course, it was a very orderly company, this of the babies and the maids. Everything is orderly here, as orderly as if poured into an iron mold and congealed. I have wondered sometimes if little boys here never feel yells in their throats that they want to let loose. Indeed, I have longed for the sight of whooping, howling little Americans tearing along from school, and would be quite willing to be pushed into the street in the melee. They are so much alive, so free, so spontaneous. While here everybody, big and little, is clipped into form.

Upon several occasions I have watched the children pouring out of the schools. There was as little demonstration as if soldiers marched in ranks. It is a fact that I have not in nine months' residence heard a child yell on the streets, or seen a bean shooter or any other immature evidence of destruction in the hands of impudent Tom Sawyers or Piggy Penningtons. Games there surely must be to keep the youthful sap flowing, but what they are or where performed is beyond present knowledge. Perhaps the order and silence are fruition of the Wohnungs, where there are no grassy lawns to play in. Or perhaps the fact that school begins at 8 A. M. has something to do with it. Anyhow, the babies are



SLAVINSKY D'AGRENEFF LEADER OF THE RUSSIAN SINGERS

quiet, the children are quiet, everything but the cobblestones and green and varietals, and they make a never-ceasing roar. As I walked back to the patch of sky and the top of the church steeple on that sunny afternoon when I saw the new leaves and the babies, other signs of Spring were at hand. The big bunch of toy balloons, red and blue as in America, but here in the grip of a stout peasant woman, was one. Further on it pleased me to note that the old gray-whiskered diensmann whom we pass on our way downtown had changed his station to the opposite side of the street, and was fairly soaking in the sunbeams. Doubtless they brought more warmth, being charged with hope, than the bowl of hot soup I have often observed him eating about noonday, when we were returning from the harmony lesson. An old woman, as gray as he, was the bearer, and stood by patiently while the meal lasted.

Since this preludium to Spring, various things have happened. A moving for one. But that is not such a great matter when a few trunks and a piano comprise all your worldly gear. We said good-bye to the five flights of stairs, the brick-paved courtyard that always made us feel like the frog who lived at the bottom of a well, except that we had climbed to the top, and to the mattress-filled windows in red ticks—the mattresses, I mean, were in the red ticks. Such a sweet color note in the general happy scheme. And there was the necessary dissonance on this particular morning, for one had fallen to the bottom of the court and lay there in the grime of a score or less of chimneys, waiting for rescue by the careless maid.

Good-bye also, though without speech, to the stout habesweigerin, her false front and black bottle, and to waiting at night at her particular door (though we may wait longer at some other one). All the above, and several items not mentioned, including the church steeple and the gray patch, without regrets. The only feeling that could be classed under this head was bestowed on our Pup, that most faithful member of the household.

Hereby should hang a little tail. But it doesn't. It's only a t-a-l-e, for our pup was not a baby dog on four legs, but a tiny stove on three. We got it when we froze out with the Swedish oven. It was so ridiculously tiny, being not half the length of a furnace pipe in size, and it looked so awfully acquainted on its three spindly legs that one of us christened it the Bras after the name wouldn't stick after. Francis Richter began calling it the Pup, and said he hoped it would soon grow up to be a comfort to us. Which in truth it was from the first quarter hour after it was connected with the oven by a pipe the size of my arm. With a few small lumps of coal we heated the room, though the strenuous little creature turned red all over in the effort.

After the Pup was satisfactorily christened, we fell into a prolonged debate as to its gender. Now I know that ordinarily this matter is just the other way about and decides the naming. But in a household with a repertoire of seven languages such a question involves hair-splitting labors and a sparkling acquaintance at least with idioms and other vague things that philologists have to wrestle with. Why talk should be masculine in German, feminine in French, Italian and Spanish, and next whisked into complete neutrality in Hungarian and English is surely a proper puzzle for philological experts. That milk should be "she" makes the German appear a shade more reasonable, but next moment the one is lost, for the Latin offshoots genderize it as "he."

When I demand a reason for such vagaries, the German member of our household pronounces that fine-sounding phrase, "for euphony." Turning to the linguist, he assures me with truly European superiority that what the makers of the languages didn't choose to consider masculine was left to the feminine and neuter, distinctions as to the two latter being somewhat indiscriminate. Well, I always knew there was only one proper tongue on earth, which doesn't bestow sex on inanimate objects and gives ladies the right of suffrage. And now see. In the end, after all



ONE TYPE OF NURSEMAID

the ebb and flow of argument over the coffee cups, a form of diversion to which the two budding geniuses under my care are much given, it fell to the

woman to settle the question. Quite as usual. When wasn't intuition triumphed over mere learning? The first time I made a fire in the Pup I knew it be-



SHE WAS OUT WITH THE RED AND BLUE BALLOONS ON THE FIRST SUNNY AFTERNOON

longed to the masculine. Why? Because it smoked.

Now that the concert season is practically over, it occurred to us one day to wonder how many musical events Francis Richter had attended in the last nine months. The statistics proved so astonishing that we regretted not having kept the count accurately. However, this young man's memory is a very good calendar, and the sum total is about right, though a few may have been overlooked. He has heard 93 concerts and 20 operas. In addition are 10 operas and concerts in Dresden, making an aggregate for his first year in Europe of 123 musical events.

Quite enough to satisfy even an omnivorous appetite, though Francis Richter's mind, with the avidity of the true composer's, has known no weariness. On the other hand, his friend, Marcel de Bouzou, has divided with me the labor of attendance, is longing for a circus for a change. By the way, this young person, in whom the spirit of youth is quite irrefragable, has ideas on music as a health course, which he formulates as follows:

- For little headaches—take Mozart powder.
- For palpitation of the heart—take Wagner's "The Flying Dutchman."
- A bad case of nerves—take Hayden water cure.
- For influenza epidemic—Richard Strauss drops.
- For that tired feeling the modern prescription consists of: 2 parts Lehár (Merry Widow), 1 part Strauss (Waltz Dream), 6 parts Mahler symphony, 6 parts Debussy, 4 parts Max Reiger.

Next came the men, in larger editions of the same garments, except that their high boots were tan color, lavishly embroidered as to the tops. They wore rich caps. The ladies, of whom there were 12 in all, entered and seated themselves in front of the children, behind which the men stood. They swept in in long robes of rose and blue satin and velvet, the entire front of each gown being covered with gold and silver embroidery. With their high, crown-like headresses, from which white, filmy veils floated to the floor, they seemed like a procession of princesses come to do honor to the Queen of Beauty. She appeared, walking alone

curled take a bath in Beethoven and you will feel like a bird in Paradise. (Signed) DE BOUZOU.

A most interesting late event was the Slavinsky d'Agreneff concert, when a company of Russians sang the folk songs of five centuries ago; also their modern church music. The patriarchal dignity of the leader, who, though old, still has a voice, seemed to transfuse itself throughout the company, from the dozen or so children up to twice that number of adults. There was a peculiar, quaint formality about all they did that seemed to suit their stately robes of red and blue velvets, heavy with jewels and richest embroidery.

Slowly pacing, the children entered first, clad in long Russian blouses, also of velvet jewel-embroidered, and with the dearest little red boots. I wished at once that all little Americans would wear them. However, not possessing the precocious dignity of these children, which is surely a preservative of leather, they would have the toes kicked out in no time. Next came the men, in larger editions of the same garments, except that their high boots were tan color, lavishly embroidered as to the tops. They wore rich caps. The ladies, of whom there were 12 in all, entered and seated themselves in front of the children, behind which the men stood. They swept in in long robes of rose and blue satin and velvet, the entire front of each gown being covered with gold and silver embroidery. With their high, crown-like headresses, from which white, filmy veils floated to the floor, they seemed like a procession of princesses come to do honor to the Queen of Beauty. She appeared, walking alone



THE NURSEMAID IS NEARLY ALWAYS OLD AND UNBEAUTIFUL

In state, in the person of the prima donna, youngest daughter of Slavinsky d'Agreneff, and looking a veritable queen arrayed in blue and silver. She was so wondrously beautiful that at the end of two hours when the concert was over, I had not tired of gazing at her. I fancied she must be a Circassian beauty, such as we read about as the favorite of an Oriental harem, until we visited the company behind the scenes and got some history.

At close range the exquisite fairness of the women proved to be but paint and powder, even of the lovely Olga herself, who quickly disappeared from view, and the jewels so lavishly used in decorating the robes were seen to be only colored stones. But there was a sort of bizarre Oriental magnificence about the scene that was striking to alien eyes. The men wearing embroidered caps lounged about smoking cigarettes, and the women looked at us curiously, while we eyed the many necklaces that literally composed the upper part of their costumes. No doubt they thought one plain clothes hideous. I am sure no thought of emancipation had ever troubled the waters of their souls, or any of Herbert Spencer's philosophy about the relation of ornaments to feminine slavery.

We were privileged to examine the splendid robe of the leader, which was a sheer, thin, transparent Empire of Russia. It is of dark crimson velvet, heavily embroidered in designs of gold and silver thread, and lined with costly furs. Its value was said to be up in the thousands of dollars. During the programme the venerable leader stood on a dais and beat time stately with his hand only, while a small boy, jeweled like a butterfly, held his cap, also jeweled. The long, slow movement of the songs, which had much singing in unison, was reminiscent of music in its infancy, touched with a tradition of the antique Greek modes frozen into the deadness of the Russian ritual.

It was all very interesting and much of it very pleasing, particularly a boating song, the rocking motion of which was done with really fine art, though the voices were what modern systems of culture call unmelodious. It is a charm in such singing, if good, akin to that of birds in the wildwood. The stiff magnificence of the costumes, the extraordinary dignity of manner, and the antique mode of the music, combined to leave an impression of having had a glimpse into a civilization both remote and strange. It was brought up to the modern note by one of the ladies of our party, who has been over here six years, remarking that all the occasion lacked of being truly Russian was a bomb. Vienna, April 20.

COMEDIES OF A MARRIAGE PARSON Curious Wedding Scenes as Observed From a Preacher's Standpoint.

LIFE in the parsonage differs essentially from that in every other house, for, inasmuch as the pastor is a public character, he and his are the property of the congregation; it opens on faces beaming or hungry for help; if the pastor's meal must be left smoking on the table day after day while husband and wife hurry to the parlor to entertain by the hour, the visitor often as not leaves something behind to smoke pleasantly at another noontide meal.

But of all these public comings and goings none are quite so full of laughter, joy and finance as the weddings. The parish wedding is a tame affair, rehearsed beforehand, rounded smoothly off by trained performers. The groom drops the ring in ecstatic moments, a fine time did I have poking one from under a bookcase once while the groom and his best man leered sheepishly at my crimson countenance; do forget to clasp hands, and often step on the bridal train at that crucial second when the turn is made afield. One unhappy creature pulled my face all askew for one miserable moment by an answer "Yes, sir, thank you" to the query, "Do you take this woman?" A later bridegroom added, at a private performance in my own house, "And mighty glad to get 'er, yer bet!"

But the parish wedding is a tame affair. The stranger in a strange town and a strange ceremony in a strange town. The clergyman soon learns the faltering step on his porch, the rattle at his belt, the nervously twisted hat, the shy pretense at some other and indifferent time, soon turns confidently and immediately to the nearest streetcar post to discover the half-hid flutter of bridal skirts. Still, the Quaker never married strangers, those who gleaming windows, those who gleaming windows, those who gleaming windows sent the timid seekers for sanctification of their love into wilder flight. The rectory opened a hospitable door to a beautiful and cordial face. "Yes," declared the rector, "Mr. Brown has just stepped over to the parish-house." At the parish-house a finally unearched janitor was sure he was at the church; but the choir, just shelving the anthem, though the main voice of their clergyman yet echoed in their ears, sent the pilgrims to a new-made widow at the south end of the city. She stilled her weeping a moment to whisper that, though his footsteps still lay damp along her porch, Mr. Brown was at the north end. He wasn't. At 11:30 a kind policeman assured a

discouraged and bedraggled pair of lovers that I "sat up all sorts of uncharitable times of nights." The bell jangled angrily above my head, and I jumping out of my first whiff of sleep, growled, "There, my laundress!—this is in my pre-nuptial days—has forgotten his key again! I do wish—there, what a cross-grained sinner I am!" So I threw up the shade and stood revealed, amid the blaze of the street light opposite, in a robe perfectly appropriate for an Episcopal clergyman.

"The fees are a source of constant palpitations, sometimes of laughter, sometimes of chagrin, for the minister finds in them all the unexpectedness and something of the excitement of a gambler's days. One pastoral brother advised me to keep in stock two varieties of certificates and discriminate. I did. I handed over the dollar king to a 50-cent couple and bestowed paternally the 124-cents variety on a youth who graciously presented me in return a \$10 bill. I don't discriminate any more. O, no!—I fling the whole collection across the parlor table and they take their choice.

But the fees! I have been paid 50 cents a quarter; nothing but a promise to "kum round Sat'd'y, when pay I develop kums h'in"—which it apparently never did—and from a dollar up, yet not so far up as to be unendurable. But the strangest case I ever saw was a girl from Massachusetts. She confessed to 30 Summers. She told the truth, but not all the truth, while his assertion of "I hope," cried I politely, "no damage has been done; but if you refer to the expected fee, that's as you deem the service worth." "I'll give you a dollar and a half about kiver!" "If that suits you it suits me," I responded. He turned to the lady of his choice. "Say, Jane, I didn't fetch no cash along; yer pay 'em."

merely chilling rebuff; with both the children—they are so often only that—and heard only protestations of romantic affection, the lad himself turns from his bride, slips back into the parlor with the fee, and a minute later, because of one kind word, is sobbing his shame and his fright out on the young pastor's breast.

These tragedies grow stern and stark across my happy memories. There was the youth—such a graceful, well-bred, well-groomed youth—who waited at my door with funeral visage and later, at the agreed-on hour, helped from the carriage a painted creature, her eyebrows smudged black even in mid-afternoon, her hair a glistening, metallic copper, her dress scarcely fit for an evening ball. The license read—"Occupation, Actress." The lad didn't sob on my breast, but one more sympathetic phrase would have brought him there. Any, had been the respectable woman of 30 who, in reply to the nuptial question, lifted up a voice of uncontrollable despair and wept—then first did I notice how the room was soaked in liquor. And those gray-haired grandparents, the only proof of whose marriage had been devoured by a fire in a city which, who came to me blushing like misbehaved school children that I might make secretly possible her retention of his soldier's pension.

The preacher longs often to say, "I don't know what to do with you. Whom thoughtlessness has joined together let common sense part asunder, ere it be too late. Indeed, one middle-aged sinner left me vowing vengeance, and next day pilloried my cruelty "to hearts that love" in the front of his column and will, I trust, be illiterate 18, be cultured 32. Yet, after all, the experience is one of sweetness and light, brings out the noblest, divinest side of human nature, shows the men and women, too, at their tenderest and bravest, and the pastoral sigh slipping after some of the retreating forms is followed by a smile ere the door is fully closed. It is so good to be young, blind to the dull, sordid facts, to trust that a pair of vigorous arms can twist the worst cross-looking blackly attired foregroom into a crown of joy. As Farmer Lydden laughs out of "Children of the Mist," "There be folks and fools"; and these are the adorable kind, ready to "give all for love," even more abundantly than Emerson contemplated. Because of the beauty of it I stand smiling at my open door, stretching my hands out over the world, benedicting, dropping a winged prayer down the long walk as they turn from the manse out into life, its duties, its joys, its infinite wonder of blessed human love, for the greatest thing on earth is love. God keep them, every one!—Rev. Jacobs Basilkanus in the Congregationalist.

THE CIRCUS FROM THE INSIDE

Harper's Weekly. "MOST performers," said the Pink Lemonade Man, "soak away their spare change in quarters, so as to have something to hock if they go broke. I flash mine mostly for business reasons, though I ain't denyin' I've converted it at times. Diamonds add dignity, especially in small towns, where they can only recognize a gentleman because he wears a high hat, patent-leather shoes and swell clothes. Besides, it makes 'em feel easier to let 'em see you trustin' a fine sparkler like that in the liquids you're selling 'em."

Here a shower of sawdust fell about us. Two boys were fighting in front of the stand, rolling on the ground and pelting each other with sawdust. "Well, I'll be—" began the Pink Lemonade Man, as a quantity of it landed in one of the tubs. Then he smiled philosophically. "I'll draw a crowd, and maybe I'll land some of 'em. Here, Jimmy," he called loudly to his assistant, "take this tub over to the dressing tent and empty it." He turned to us. "What he'll do," he confided, "is strain

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