

# BLESSED EVENT IN VIENNA

BY MARTHA FOLEY

**K**üss die Hand, gnädige Frau," greeted the baby specialist of the Rudolfinerhaus, where the evening before I had given birth to a baby boy. "Your son is in A-1 condition." And he went on to explain that he spoke such excellent American because he had the very great honor to be president of the Rotary Club of Vienna. "A wonderful organization, *gnädige Frau*," the *Herr Doktor* told me every day. "We Viennese are very proud to belong to it."

The daily Rotarian reports on my son were only one of the many diversions of my stay in the little lying-in hospital of the 80's on the edge of the Wienerwald, where sometimes, if the night were quiet, I could hear the Beethoven brook repeating chords of the Pastoral Symphony, and if the night were not, could remember that a few doors away on this same suburban street Schubert had evoked far sweeter cries than those of the newest generation in the nursery below me.

There were five Viennese meals daily, with carpets of veal fried into *Schnitzel* for lunch. There were visits from the Stork Mama, the staff midwife who assists the obstetrician in a Viennese hospital, and visits from the *Oberschwester*, formerly a baroness, who was more smilingly sad each day about the endless distresses of her country. And arguments with the baby's nurse, who declared boy babies in America might wear pink but that any such effeminate color was an in-

sult to a newborn Austrian male, and therefore she would not tolerate pink garments or blankets, which seemed to be the only kind in the layette of my son.

There was, too, the misery of the woman in the next room, who told me, via the hall nurse, how ashamed she was because she had given birth to a second daughter when her husband needed a son so badly, he being from the Balkans, where a man is not a man until he has male offspring and a beard. There were translations of her English lessons for the day nurse, who was learning the *Sprache* with a burr from the Scotsman whose twice-a-week lessons are the most popular radio feature in Vienna. There were orders from the house doctor that I be given innumerable cups of hay-flavored camomile tea—next to beer, Vienna's favorite brew for weak women—and please would the night nurse kindly leave my window open, yes, wide open? And there was the day-long company of my new little son. Maternity in Vienna is *gemütlich* and merry.

The Rudolfinerhaus is a private hospital and, according to Viennese standards stands halfway between a sanatorium and a public hospital. It is not the most fashionable place in Vienna to have a baby, but the high traditions of its nursing staff set it above the public hospitals. Babies of conservative families—families that *bürgerlich* Vienna still speaks of as *die Besten*—are born in the more expensive sanatoria, of which the most famous probably is the

Loew. This has such elaborate equipment as a banqueting-room for the rabbi and the guests at circumcision rites.

Only the destitute go to the great public hospital, the Allgemeine Krankenhaus. This is not only because the rules of the place limit it to people of little means but because autopsies are performed by law on all who die there and because the specialists of the Krankenhaus, much as they may attract American physicians for post-graduate courses, have the reputation, even with their students, of treating patients as cases rather than as human beings. Krankenhaus nurses are graded as servants, and patients complain that only generous tips save them from being neglected. Viennese of any standing whatever—and even in post-war Vienna there is loyalty to class distinctions—spend their last groschen to keep up a front by being nicely ill in a private hospital or sanatorium.

It was to raise the nursing standards of Vienna, as well as to provide a private hospital specializing in the care of surgical cases, that Theodor Billroth, one of the greatest of surgeons, founded, in 1882, the Rudolfinerhaus. Its construction was not completed until 1894 and meantime, in 1889, the Crown Prince Rudolph and his *Liebchen*, the pretty young Baroness Maria Vetsera, were found mysteriously dead in scandalous circumstances in the royal hunting-lodge at Mayerling. To please old Franz Josef, who believed to the day of his death that he had fooled the Austrian public into thinking his son's death natural, the new hospital was named after the dead prince, "solutions" of whose murder or suicide still make page one copy for the Viennese newspapers.

With the opening of the Rudolfinerhaus, women of standing in Austria for the first time took up nursing, many of the nurses

being titled. Titles have gone out since the war, but the nurses at the Rudolfinerhaus continue to be drawn from among upper-class women. Their blue-clad group has a rigid discipline and its members point proudly to signs in every room saying that they are forbidden to accept gratuities. Only an occasional giddy Viennese is amused at the sight of such prim virtue in an institution named after the notorious Rudolph.

The Rudolfinerhaus, for all its fame, consists only of two small buildings, the second stories of which are joined by a bridge. One of the buildings is devoted to maternity cases and the other to surgery. The paint is peeling off the outer walls, the small entrance with its dull green and brown coloring is like the entrance to a cheap American hotel, and the equipment generally is run down, but no more so than in most of the other older Austrian institutions for which the restrictions of the peace treaties have meant decay. Only the Socialists in Vienna, with their new coöperative apartment-houses and kindergartens and children's asylums, have been able to make any sort of flourish, and even theirs is limited.

Like the status of the place as an institution, the cost of lying-in at the Rudolfinerhaus is middling. The daily charge for a first-class room is twenty-six schillings—three and a half dollars—and the entire cost of my two-week stay, including extra charges for medicine, care of the baby, anaesthetics and nursing, totalled but 818 schillings, or approximately \$115. This sum also included a charge of twenty-eight cents a day for heating my room.

The obstetrician's bill for the actual delivery was \$70, perhaps one-fifth of what an obstetrician of the same standing in the United States would have charged. An American physician in Vienna estimated

that for the same care as I received there I would have had to pay at least \$500 in New York.

My obstetrician was one of the best known in Central Europe. Like all Viennese obstetricians, he is hostile toward experiments in the alleviation of parturitional pain. I made the rounds of the plush-parlor waiting-rooms without finding one willing to administer either synergistic analgesia—the Gwathmey technique of intra-muscular injections of magnesium sulphate and morphine during labor—or ether-oil instillations, both of which have become widely used in recent years in the United States. None was even interested in experimenting with these methods on me as a willing victim.

The last obstetrician whom I consulted and finally engaged was the most tender-hearted. He did not try to quote to me, as had one of his colleagues, that chapter of Genesis which declares that “in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children” and which was used also by the founder of Vienna’s Frauenklinik as divine authority for ruling against all experiments in pain-easing obstetrics. No, my obstetrician assured me, he would make things as easy as possible.

“I use the best, the safest method, chloroform *à la reine*,” he said. “Only I don’t use chloroform any more; I use ether. Little whiffs of ether toward the end. It’s called *à la reine* because it was invented to help out Queen Victoria.”

## II

“Remember, you are eating for two!” This admonition, which has become anathema to every authority on pre-natal care in America, is still urged upon every expectant mother in Vienna. Not only is she admonished to eat for the next generation, but also to drink for it. Cocktails and

spirituous liquors, which would scarcely occur anyway to a Viennese woman, are *verboten*, but with beer—with the froth of great steins of Gösserbrau—she is free to blow off all fears of her coming ordeal!

The Viennese do not consider beer part of a special diet. It to them is so essential an accompaniment to food that it never occurs to them to forbid it to a pregnant woman. They were only amused, therefore, when a German physician came out with a statement urging a beer diet for expectant mothers and was angrily contradicted by a French doctor who declared that wine might be all right, indeed was splendid as a tonic, but that beer was disastrous. Beer flows in Vienna as calmly and matter-of-factly as the Danube, and the Viennese sings of the one with a glass of the other in his hand.

The beer really has no ill effect, as far as I could determine, on a woman or her child. Certainly it didn’t bother me. But aside from drinking it, I followed the usual pre-natal diet as advised in the United States. That is, I avoided smoking, cocktails, too much meat and certain acid foods. The expectant mother of the middle class in Vienna is not given as close medical attention as is now considered necessary in America. She is examined but twice during her pregnancy, and then only for specific symptoms.

If I had been a native Viennese of the working class, the Socialist municipal government would have taken a much greater interest in me and my child. It deals out patronage to the cradle. Beside free medical advice, every working class mother is provided with a complete layette from blankets to bibs. At all elections red flags wave the reminder, “Not a child is born into rags in Vienna.”

Since, as an *Ausländerin*, I did not merit a Socialist layette, I had to struggle inde-

pendently with the difficult business of outfitting an American baby in Central European garments. It is not so many years since Viennese babies were swaddled, and vestiges still remain in the modern Viennese infant's wardrobe of the habit of strapping hand and foot. One of the most important features of a Vienna baby's equipment is a long, narrow, mattress-like affair, covered with a linen case into which the baby fits. The end of the mattress is folded up over the baby's feet and he is as secure as a mummy in its case. Reposing thus, he is presented for the first time to his father, and the mattress is used generally to convey him from place to place. One Viennese mother was a little supercilious when she heard I had bought a baby carriage to use instead of a mattress. "Oh," she said, "your baby is to be a little English gentleman and go about in his carriage!"

But she was Old Vienna. The new was represented by the nurse attending another American woman's baby. She threatened to quit her job unless a blue and sufficiently elaborate infant's coach was bought to match her blue costume.

### III

Mine was the first foreign baby that had been born in the Rudolfinerhaus for some time. Its predecessor was a Japanese, the offspring of a diplomat's wife.

"Pure white it was, *gnädige Frau*," the head nurse told me. "Not one bit yellow for three days. And then, the poor *Bübchen*, it got more and more yellow until it was all Japanese!"

My arrival aroused much curiosity. Apart from my nationality, the staff was interested in me because the obstetrician had told them of my interest in what they considered exotic ways of delivering chil-

dren into the world. The Stork Mama, as his right-hand woman, assured me long before I had any discomfort, "*Schmerz—es muss sein!*" (Pain—it must be!) And she kept up this refrain whenever she saw me, from the time of my admission to the day of my departure two weeks later.

Accommodations in the Rudolfinerhaus are divided, like those in a European railway train, into classes. My first-class room was a large, rather stark, private chamber, furnished with two beds, a couch, a wash-bowl, a mirror and a chest of drawers. The second bed was intended for any member of my family who wished to stay over night with me. Like the rest of the hospital, the room was badly in need of a coat of paint. The bedclothes were the astonishing ones which make sleeping in Vienna so difficult for a foreigner. They consisted of a blanket, hardly wider than a belly-band, and one short, very thick feather bed, about half the length of the bedstead. Under these covers the Viennese, despite their baroque girth, somehow manage to curl up for the night.

Every evening of my stay I had to request the nurse to open the window. Houses where Americans live in Vienna are identified by their open windows at night. All Viennese bedrooms are aired for an hour or so early in the morning and then sealed up until the next morning. Some of the nurses were afraid I would be too cold with the window open, but one said cheerfully, "I open my windows, too, that is, in the Summer; and I think it's really good for the health."

The hospital serves five meals a day; the first breakfast, at seven o'clock, of rolls and coffee (the famous Vienna coffee, which is made of very little coffee and a lot of compressed figs and served with whipped cream); a "fork" break-

fast at 10:30, of Frankfurters (in Vienna they are always called Frankfurters and in Frankfort, Wienerwurst), goulash or eggs; a five-course dinner at one; a *Jause* of rolls and tea or coffee at four-thirty, and at seven a supper of cold meats and salad. Between meals the recumbent patient is beseeched to eat fruit and drink milk. The second day after delivery, when in every other place in the world she would be eating sparingly, the Vienna mother is heartened by the immensity of a *Wienerschnitzel*. There is little hope of her ever regaining a pre-maternal figure.

The average length of stay in the hospital is ten days. Many leave in seven. The Rudolfinerhaus was surprised when I asked for a two-week reservation. And when informed that many women in the United States remain in a hospital for three weeks, the nurses were almost as much amused as at my desire for an easy delivery. It is not that the women of Vienna are sturdier, in fact they are much more self-indulgent than is the American woman, but because in their homes they more often have nurses to care for their babies and maids to wait on them.

European men are fond of scoffing at Americans for pampering their women, but their own women are much more likely to loll on silken cushions while attendants wait on them. When the National Council of Business and Professional Women held its international congress in Vienna, I heard one of the Vienna hostesses ask a school teacher delegate, "But you would never soil those pretty white hands of yours washing dishes, would you?" When the answer in mid-Western American was, "Why I have even scrubbed floors with these hands," the Viennese woman gave the American a smile of benevolent pity.

The actual adventure in my case, I sup-

pose, was no more nor less unpleasant than the average childbirth without benefit of special palliatives. The *Herr Doktor* tried to be kind by holding up a minute bottle of ether and saying, "See this? When it gets too bad I shall give you some of it."

I have heard often that the pains of parturition are obliterated from a woman's memory by a beneficent Nature anxious that she should produce more children. I don't believe it. I can remember exactly the sort and intensity of the agony from the moment, in a desperate effort at self-control, I fastened my eyes on the top branches of the Wienerwald trees, black lace against the setting sun outside my window, until four hours later, when I could hear the *Herr Doktor* telling my husband, "You have a fine boy, I congratulate you."

The baby was not shown to me until late the next day. Then a perfectly placid little person, not at all the red and wrinkled mite a new baby ought to be, was trundled into my room. Babies in the Rudolfinerhaus are bathed and kept at night in a separate nursery, but spend the entire day in their mothers' rooms, unlike in American hospitals, where they are presented to their mothers only to be fed. It is taken for granted that their mothers will nurse them at the breast, although this is a comparatively recent custom among upper-class Viennese women.

Until the war split off Czechoslovakia from Austria, Bohemian wet nurses nourished Vienna's children. Sometimes as many as two or three of these bouncing, beshawled wenches were maintained for one child. Their beer rations ran up into a gallon or so a day. But when Czechoslovakia became independent, they were shipped back home and no more are allowed to reënter Austria. Since then they

have been up against hard times. Recently the wet nurses of the town which once supplied the largest number to Vienna denounced loudly the injustice of a peace treaty which had deprived their profession of a decent livelihood.

The nurses at the Rudolfinerhaus, *Schwestern* they are called, in their blue-and-white checkered uniforms and with the typical Viennese combination of yellow hair and brown eyes, are softly pretty. They are probably the only well-bred women in Vienna who do manual work. They are proud of the ladylike tradition which attaches to their hospital and go about the most odious tasks with the air of very tender duchesses.

These nurses work much longer hours than is now customary in American hospitals, their day beginning at five in the morning and ending at nine at night. Each is assigned four rooms to tend, including the lighter cleaning. In the morning they claim from the nursery the four babies belonging to their rooms and take complete charge of the infants for the day, as well as of the mothers.

The nursery where the babies sleep is a small room in which as many as twenty to twenty-five are kept at a time, identified by numbered tags around their arms. The equipment is limited. A large table in the middle of the room is spread with antiseptics for the dressing of the babies. Two ordinary washbowls at one end serve as bathtubs. Baskets on wheels lined up around the walls are the babies' beds.

Like its Japanese predecessor, my own baby became quite yellow a few days after its birth. It had jaundice. Both the child specialist and the house doctor laughed. Nothing at all to worry about, they said. Didn't 90% of all newborn babies in Vienna get jaundice, so what of it? None ever died. *Nein*, they didn't know the

cause of this infantile jaundice and there was no special treatment for it. It was a nice, *gemütliche* malady. Just let the child sleep and not force him to eat. He would get better. And he did.

Life in a Viennese hospital is just as easy-going as that. Hygiene, of course, is observed—enough so that the mortality rate from puerperal fever in Vienna is far below that of the average American city. And if Viennese hospital equipment is limited and hospital practices are often antiquated, both doctors and nurses make up for it by an extraordinarily warm-hearted concern for their patients. The cold-bloodedness observed by American medical students in the research work at the public Krankenhaus is quite lacking in private obstetrical cases. Since obstetrics in Vienna is traditional, obstetricians are gentle, which is traditionally Viennese. Typically, the major discomfort is ameliorated with the minor amenities.

#### IV

The pediatrics of Vienna's Rotary Club president was not as American as his social affiliations. He refused to consider the pamphlet on infant care put out by the Children's Bureau at Washington, and which, after a series of disagreements with him and other doctors, had to be my final guide in caring for the baby.

Except in omitting night feedings to an even greater extent than is urged in this pamphlet, the Viennese child specialists are away behind the times. One thing alone proves this. When a child cries at night, they suggest that he be given a soother, one of those adenoid-breeding rubber nipples on a celluloid base tied to a string around the neck. On these the Viennese babies, high and low, suck constantly. It was in the most matter-of-fact



way that both child specialists I first consulted urged this advice, which is violently detested by American physicians.

In fact, it was only after I had consulted three different specialists that I found one who was tolerant of the programme outlined for infant care in the American government brochure. And this was a woman physician. But even she sometimes took the attitude that she was indulging a foreigner in curious ways. The pamphlet, for instance, insists that "cod-liver oil should begin before the end of the first month of the baby's life, preferably by the end of the second week." But the Viennese do not administer cod-liver oil generally to healthy infants, although, in their long, gray Winters, Vitamin D is hidden with the sun, and it was only on my own initiative that my baby finally got the oil when he was two months old. Likewise, it was only by my giving it to him myself that he got the orange juice which the American schedule calls for at the age of one month, and which he might never have been given if I had not dared to supersede the doctor's orders.

An infant's diet, as outlined by these Vienna specialists, is wholly milk and water the first few months. Then the baby is given, in addition, at the age of about four months, cream of wheat cooked for two hours in broth made of veal bones. Various patented milk preparations, some of which are in disrepute in America, are also fed him. As he grows older the baby's diet, like that of his rotund elders, becomes rich in starch and sugar. Where an American baby would be given hard, unsweetened crusts or rusks to chew upon, a Vienna infant munches soft, sweet cakes. The variety known in America as lady-fingers was especially recommended by one physician.

All the paraphernalia of the modern

American nursery, play pens, toidy-seats, "scientific" toys, tissue diapers, etc., are missing in Vienna. But the mother in average circumstances is more able to afford a good-natured but well-trained nurse, who will relieve her of much of the baby's care and leave her freer for her own activities, than is possible for such a mother of a young baby in New York. For the sum of \$15 a month I had the full services of a nurse who was a hospital graduate and whose attachment to my baby was hardly less than mine.

To assure the child born of American parents in Austria American citizenship, it is necessary to register its birth within twenty-four hours at the United States consulate. Payment of \$2 in United States currency is also required. Since the importation and use of foreign currency in Austria is proscribed, a new American father has to hustle in and out of black bourses, where dollars are bootlegged, to make his son an American citizen. Instead of providing an infant with an American passport, his picture, name and the date of his birth are inserted in the passport of one of the parents.

The Viennese like children, and Vienna which, despite an occasional comic opera *Putsch*, is now the quietest as well as the dullest of all large European cities, with its many parks, its worship of sunlight, its good milk and water, is an excellent place in which to bring them up. Viennese children are indulged in more ways and urged to be childlike to a greater extent, perhaps, than are children anywhere else in the world. Even the poorest family seems able to equip its young with many and elaborate sports outfits, from leathern alpinism breeches to velvet skating skirts. Religious and political organizations are proud of their child members and with the slightest excuse will march

them around the Ring in long, triumphant parades.

The Viennese still weep as they recall the wartime hardships of their children, when mothers forced milk from their breasts to feed children of two and three years of age and other agonized parents shipped off youngsters by the thousands to foster-homes in Holland and the Scandinavian countries. They are still grateful out of all proportion to the American relief committee which fed their children at the close of the war, and there is a Hooverstrasse in Vienna to commemorate a man who now is more popular in Austria than he is in his own country.

Viennese enthusiasm for children simplifies many of her difficulties for an American mother. She finds a greater and more general concern for her child than she would in New York. If she house-hunts, she will not be turned away from so many apartments because she has a child. Servants will not object to working in a home where there is one. There will be no danger of kidnapping; the crime is unknown in Vienna. She may even tell stories of her child's unprecedented cleverness, for her Viennese friends really will be interested.

Best of all, in Vienna there is no Mother's Day to embarrass her.



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MR. SNELL OF NEW YORK—Mr. Speaker, reserving the right to object, what is going to happen between now and 12.30?

MR. HOWARD—Mr. Speaker, I will explain that a lady wishes to see me at the door, and I cannot get back before that time.

THE HON. JOHN E. RANKIN, LL.B., member of the lower House from Mississippi, makes a contribution to the American language:

I introduce the Norris bill verbatim, spelling, punctuation.

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MR. EATON OF NEW JERSEY—What size shoe does the gentleman wear?

MR. ZIONCHECK OF WASHINGTON—No. 9, and I am proud of it. It is a plain answer. I do not try to evade any question. What size do you wear?

MR. EATON—No. 10, and I am proud of it. If the gentleman's head was as big as his feet he would amount to something.

## GEORGIA

THE copy-desk of the eminent Atlanta *Constitution* converts Hebrew into a Spanish dialect:

Jesus never went before the San Hedrin to fuss about laws and their enforcement.