

Austria—May, 1922

By OSWALD GARRISON VILLARD

Vienna, May 15

INTO the Hotel Bristol there walked the other afternoon on crutches the wreck of a woman to sell the guests autographed pictures of a wonderful actress, wonderful in her looks, her charm, and her histrionic ability. When I was last in Vienna Helene Odilon was probably the foremost actress in German-speaking Europe. Fortunes were lavished upon her, her salary was enormous, managers fell over themselves to get her to visit their theaters. Now fate has reduced her to absolute beggary. The queen of the stage is today hawking the pictures of her past as the flower-women pester one in the restaurants with their wares.

To many the fate of Helene Odilon seems the fate of Austria. In numerous ways the parallel is exact. Austria, too, is partly paralyzed; Austria, too, bespeaks public charity and needs it. For Austria, too, it is now a struggle to keep body and soul together. The gayest and most gallant of cities, rejoicing in the pomp and circumstance of a court whose ceremonial exceeded that of any other in costly magnificence, with an aristocracy as light-living as any in the world, Vienna today appears somber beside the ghost of its own past, beside that Vienna which Kaiser Franz Josef gambled away when he allowed the mischief-makers of his Foreign Office to cajole or to lead him into the war with Serbia. Half her population today lives from hand to mouth, just being able to keep body and soul together. Many are slowly fading away from undernourishment. Nearly everybody dreads the morrow, dares not look into the future—certainly not the middle class, many of whom have lived so far only by selling their life-time acquirements. "Are Russian conditions coming?" is the query repeatedly put to foreigners suspected of having special knowledge. "Is there hope of help ere we perish?"—hard questions to answer when within a week the krone has dropped from 8,500 to 10,000 to the dollar and an official statement declares that the cost of living rose 25 per cent between April 15 and May 15; when the Allies move but slowly to give financial aid and will not admit the plain truth that the plight of Austria today is due far more to the Treaty of St. Germain than to the war. The crimes of the infamous treaties are bringing all Europe down; it is literally at the door of the old men who made them that here as in other countries life has for multitudes become merely a desperate struggle to exist, without rest, or peace, or joy, or pleasure, or color, or light, or hope, with dread ever clutching at their throats.

Not that Austria's situation is as hopeless as Helene Odilon's. The worst of it is that this decay of a state, this terrible suffering, is preventable. It could be speedily ended if all concerned were to buckle to the task with the will to victory over the existing economic evils. Indeed, there is much that is cheering about the situation. Beyond question the population looks and is a great deal better than it was two years ago. The noble work of the Friends Mission and of English and American generosity—unprecedented in the history of war—has saved thousands upon thousands of children as did the hospitality of neutral countries like Switzerland and Holland. Food there is now in plenty; it is

no longer a wild, desperate struggle to get it, but the cost of it often puts it beyond reach. I hear it said that the working people have no reason to complain and it is true that some of them are doing very well—if they are not of the growing army of hard drinkers and if there are one or two wage-earners in the family besides the head. But a family I know of whose two heads bring in 210,000 crowns a month have a desperate struggle to live and educate their three children. When carfares cost 850 crowns a day—they will shortly be 1,200—when a pound of meat costs 1,200 to 1,500 crowns, when bread costs between 850 and 1,000 a loaf and may soon go to 1,200, when eggs are beyond reach, milk a luxury, and butter unheard of, when a piece of soap costs 850 crowns and is hardly usable then, and a collar cannot be bought for less than 1,200, then in such a family the matter of clothes becomes a catastrophe, even where the workers are skilled and draw much more than 210,000 a month.

Plainly it is not in the financial condition of the people that we must look for cheer, particularly in view of the unemployment. It is rather in their extraordinary patience and endurance, in the courage of their leaders, and in the undeveloped resources of even this fragment of a country which is all that the victors have left to Austria. This country has resources both in its people and its possessions. Even in its present state the skill of its workmen has not suffered though their output has decreased per hour or per day. Austrians are an extraordinarily inventive people, as our Patent Office can testify. They have rare taste, as their shop windows bear witness—many Americans would rather shop here than in Paris. They are a people primarily interested in fine retail production; they are not naturally organizers or operators of industry on a great scale. But they are remarkably artistic and so we have it that, while multitudes suffer and wonder how they can keep body and soul together, in the fine arts there was never greater activity. Musicians, actors, sculptors, painters—wherever one turns the creative fever rages. The opera is superb and nearly pays its way. Even with the depreciated currency foreign artists are coming here to sing and play for a public which understands and appreciates. True, the opera audiences are largely composed of foreigners. Among the throng that stands every night at the opera are many who sat in the best seats before the war and among the Austrians present are many who were never able to go to the opera—these are familiar phenomena in all European countries. Of course, many who used to be the most regular attendants can no longer go. The old aristocracy has simply faded away. It can no longer be distinguished in the Ring; its once wonderful equipages have gone; it has in considerable degree retired to its country seats in mortal terror that it will find itself dispossessed from them. Yet somehow or other the commercially maintained theaters sustain themselves and all are hospitable to new talent and new ideas. I saw an exquisite performance given by Ellen Tels, the Russian dancer, and five of her extraordinarily gifted pupils, and the great audience seemed to me to be largely Viennese. That same evening there was opened in the National, formerly the Royal, Library an exhibition of

books, documents, manuscripts, and other treasures, including two early Shakespeare folios, which this republican government had found in the library and proposes to make more generally available. The President of the Republic thought it worth his while to open this exhibit in person.

One finds it hard to believe, therefore, that a people so gifted and so devoted to the nobler aspirations of mankind can be in danger of perishing from the earth. But when one turns to the economic side of things it is hard not to surrender to the blackest kind of pessimism, which is particularly noticeable among the foreign newspaper writers in Vienna, especially those who have recently visited the Balkan states and Hungary. They frankly do not see any light ahead, not because they are without remedies to suggest or because there are no real remedies, but chiefly because there is nowhere in Europe that Christian and healing spirit of friendliness and good-will which seems essential to any restoration of Europe to sanity and order. The wickedness of Versailles has poisoned men's minds and souls everywhere; nationalism and militarism flourish, together with grim reaction, in more than one country. The old and new nations of Central Europe and of the Balkans dying of a common disease cannot come together for their common cause. A customs union of the Little Entente plus Austria, Hungary, Poland, Italy, and Germany is one of the first things that sound statesmanship would suggest. Yet it is today impossible. The attitude of the new countries, which in the last analysis owe their existence to American troops, is responsible. They are so jealous of their newly acquired sovereignties and their independence that they will not take any broad look at the situation; they fear that if they take one step toward real cooperation with Hungary and Austria they may lose some of their unrighteous gains at Versailles. At the Porto Rosa Conference some beginning was made toward the abolition of absolute tariff prohibitions among the new states and Hungary and Austria upon the initiative of Hungary; at Genoa even this little advance went by the board.

It astounded me, therefore, to find so much optimism among the heads of the Austrian Government. In the President, Dr. Michael Hainisch, in Chancellor Schober, in the president of the Parliament, Karl Seitz, and in others Austria has officials of which any country might well be proud. Their honesty, their integrity, their intelligence, their desire to serve are beyond question. Yet, after my talks with some of them I was amazed to find that to their minds the problem of Austria seemed so simple. What they are clamoring for is an Allied loan of twelve million pounds sterling—two pounds per head of population. With this granted they feel that the way to stabilization of the currency will be won, and the stabilization of the crown is, of course, the immediate requisite. One government expert with whom I talked is sanguine that with this loan the battle will be gained, because its granting, he says, will restore the shaken confidence of the Austrians in their Government and their future. At present there is a flight of capital out of the country which the Government cannot check. It does not go in large amounts in trunks over the border but it manifests itself in the constant buying of foreign currencies. Whenever anybody has anything to save he buys American dollars or English pounds. If confidence returns the people will begin to put their savings into Austrian securities and institutions and money will be forthcoming to develop Austrian enterprises.

I pointed out to him that the mere obtaining of such a loan would not of itself stabilize the budget and that to hold up the crown would call for the expenditure of a good deal of the twelve millions, just as a good bit of the two and a half millions already obtained by Austria has gone for that purpose. I asked again about the interest charges on the twelve millions, in itself a vast sum in the present depreciated currency, but this too could, he thought, be overcome and the budget gradually made to balance, for much of the twelve millions would go into constructive works, such as development of water power, the electrification of certain railroad lines, etc. The return of optimism he considered the crux of the whole problem.

Now courage and optimism are excellent things in a country's leaders, in fact they are necessary to success. But the Austrian Government has buoyed up the hopes of its people with promises based upon Allied assurances which often never came true, and the people are getting skeptical about new promises. They are losing heart. Every time that the cost of living rises, it sounds to multitudes like a death knell and they are not likely to stand it without protest indefinitely. They can see how it is that the vicious circle of higher taxes, higher wages, and higher costs operates, but what they ask for is some remedy. I am frank to confess that I think that they and the Allies have reason to feel that the Government could display more vigor in dealing with internal problems while waiting for the loan which they ought to have.

Experts admit that there are additional taxes which could be imposed upon luxuries and other articles, and that the machinery of collecting the taxes can be made more effective and productive. Then Sir William Goode, the English economic observer here, is correct in saying that as long as tariffs are imposed the Government ought to collect the existing customs duties at a rate equivalent to gold instead of as at present in the depreciated paper currency on a basis determined by an arbitrary multiple fixed from time to time. Difficult as it is, the problem of reducing the number of officials must be grappled with, not without sympathy and intelligence and the aid of special employment bureaus. Endless red-tape and inherited circumlocution and inefficiency must be done away with. Next, the Government ought not to let a day pass without devoting itself most earnestly to the development of agriculture. What is left of rural Austria produces only about two months' food for the nation. But there are observers who believe that with scientific methods the productiveness of the land could be enormously increased. There is not a day to be lost. Again, much could be done by a vigorous government to attract more foreign travelers to Austria, which must in this matter take a leaf out of the book of Switzerland. It has wonderful natural attractions to lure people, quite apart from the charms of Vienna itself. Austria is in the position of a bankrupt who has got to use to the uttermost every asset he has to offer. That is the way a sound bankrupt, if one may use such a phrase, gets back to a solvent state. The present attitude of leaning back and placing all hopes upon drawing a rich Allied loan out of the lottery of fate smacks too much of the broken-down aristocrat seeking only to keep himself going in ease, and thinking only of paying interest, never of returning the capital. Whether the Allies give twelve or eight millions to Austria the fact remains that some day that loan has got to be repaid.

For that reason as for others the Austrian Government

ought to be devoting itself to small economies. It ought to be doing away with such luxuries as the Spanish Riding School and its wonderful horses—a relic of the empire. It ought to utilize to the uttermost what it has taken over from the royal family—there are many minor works of art which could be disposed of for considerable sums in Berlin, London, Paris, and New York. Then, if it had the courage of Lenin, it would tackle the problem of the church. There are untold treasures in the churches, monasteries, and convents of Austria, which do nobody any good whatever. They are worth many times twelve million pounds, these hoarded jewels and precious metals. The possible income from them is supporting nobody; the church is not using them in any way. I know that this suggestion will be greeted with derision. Austria, a Catholic country, give up its church treasures? Lay profane hands upon the sacred private property of the church? Is it not bad enough that the wicked Bolsheviks have been doing something of this kind? Well, perhaps it is a counsel of perfection. Yet I have a feeling that even well-intrenched Catholic dignitaries are amenable to reason. Certainly if I were one of them in Austria I should be thinking very seriously if there could be a better way of increasing the popularity of the church than by helping nation and people with the proceeds of unneeded and unused treasures, and I should be reflecting that there have been times in history when starving peoples have been known to help themselves both in palace and in cloister.

There is still another privileged class that the Austrian Government has not yet had the courage to tackle—the great land-owners. Their estates must be broken up. Scientific agriculture in the world will not be sufficient. There must be an early allotment of more farms to the workers; land not in use must be made to bear. There ought to be as intensive a garden-and-farm campaign to utilize every bit of ground as there was in America and in Germany during the war. Reduction of food prices and increase of the food supply are as necessary in this terrible peace as in war. The Government ought to be giving greater aid and attention to such admirable enterprises as the Austrian Land Settlements undertaken and carried on by the Friends Relief Mission. The city of Vienna has advanced credits of about 300,000,000 kronen, exclusive of mortgages to about the same amount, and has allotted, in conjunction with the state, about 800 acres for the cultivation of gardens and farming. On these settlements there are being built, with the further aid of foreign benefactions, admirable workers' cottages, a considerable part of the work on which is done by the workers themselves after working hours and on Saturday afternoons and Sundays. Here self-help and the best principles of the cooperative movement unite to contribute to the solution of the acute housing problem. On the small tracts of land behind their homes the settlers raise about all the vegetables they need, and each home has a small stable in which there are chickens, pigs, geese, goats, etc. Nothing that I saw in Vienna impressed me more than the possibilities in this movement. Yet the Government has still to throw itself into the movement with all the zeal the cause deserves. And of course an up-to-date Government in a tight fix and seriously desirous of serving its suffering people ought to be devoting itself to the whole great field of cooperative undertakings. Were I dictator of Austria I am inclined to think that my first act would be to appoint a Minister of Cooperation, with particular orders to combat the high cost of living by cooperative buying.

I am quite aware that Austrian readers of this list of constructive suggestions will shake their heads and say that this is all very well but that they live in a land where politics still rule. There you have it again. At every turn political considerations hamper the salvage work. They play politics in Austria as well as in America and elsewhere. I confess that I marvel how they can do so either in Austria or Germany. Where there is such terrible suffering, where whole classes are going down under one's eyes, I wish there could be applied some of the patriotic cries which we used to hear, so strident and raucous, during the war. There ought to be a solid front against death and starvation.

In Austria today the Schober Government lives by a coalition of Christian Socialists and *Grossdeutschen* which gives it a majority of only two or three votes. The Socialists are the formal opposition, and decline responsibility for the Government's acts, but they really exercise great power because they represent the masses of the cities and actually can and do bring about the fall of ministers. Alas, the Socialists have no more shown themselves equal to the emergencies and needs of the hour in Austria than elsewhere. Allowance must, of course, be made here as in Germany for the fact that the old Hapsburg and Hohenzollern systems killed all possibility of training democratic statesmen—who does not remember the shout that went up when Zimmermann became German Foreign Secretary, the first bourgeois ever to obtain that position? Austria has a long row to hoe and Germany, too, before its public men have been trained in self-government and parliamentary rule—if they can be when the Mother of Parliaments and our own Congress are in such deep decay. It is the day everywhere of small men in Parliament. It is a commonplace here that the leaders of the parties in the Austrian Parliament are much better than their parties. Under the Constitution of Austria today the President, Dr. Hainisch, has very little power. But it makes an American envious to see so highly educated, cosmopolitan, trained, and attractive a personality at the head of the state. It is not President Hainisch or Chancellor Schober that I criticise when I say that the Government is weak and should be more aggressive and vigorous in grappling with the situation; the responsibility rests far more with the utterly mediocre Parliament. But that is only another reason why those who lend money to Austria would be justified in coupling with the loan pledges that the Austrian Government devote itself to cleaning house, stop playing politics, and really set itself some of the tasks outlined above. Bad as the Treaty of St. Germain is, grave as have been the sins of the Allies, after all the salvation of Austria in the last resort must come from Austria itself and not through any loan from England or America.

Beyond that, however, it all comes back to the Treaty of Versailles and its companion piece in wrongdoing, the Treaty of St. Germain. There will be no peace and no final economic salvation in Europe until these infamous documents are made scraps of paper. Never did *The Nation* do a better deed than in calling the former the "Madness of Versailles" the instant it appeared. Whatever trail one follows in studying these complicated European conditions one comes back to the fact that at the bottom of most of the evils lies that treaty and the spirit of bitterness and revenge in which it was written. With every day that passes without its revision the danger becomes greater that all Europe will perish from a peace which is more deadly than the war it sought to end.

Amherst: A Liberal College

By LUCIEN PRICE

RED-BRICK Georgian architecture gleaming through the new green of foliage; smooth-shaven lawns patterned with pools of golden sunshine and irregular isles of shade; bird choirs in leafy chancels; fruit trees and flowering shrubs in their bridal white; five hundred young men at work and at play; and, all round, an amphitheater of mountain walls lifting ramparts smoke-blue or forest-green to the flying Alps of cloudland—such is Amherst in May.

It is no lovelier than many another New England town, though of all New England's academic towns it is to me the loveliest. And I hasten to add that Amherst is not my Alma Mater. Harvard is. Amherst is, however, my Alma Step-Mater, and no Step-Mater could have been more Alma. For three successive years it has been my fortune to spend the month of May there, living at the edge of town, frying my own fish, and endeavoring to mind my own business; eating, to be sure, at faculty and student boarding-houses, chatting casually with students and professors; but with no thought of bearing the testimony which follows: that Amherst is very much by way of becoming what it has set out to be—a liberal college. In what ensues, there is no attempt to speak authoritatively. It is the casual, almost involuntary, observation of an outsider. Therein lies whatsoever value it may have.

Of course you would know that you were in a college town. Wandering past a church you hear a Wagnerian chorus pealing out of the basement. Choir rehearsal: choir of high-school boys and girls drilled by a local music teacher. In the boot-shining parlors hangs a slate with some Latin scribbled in chalk which says that you will please not bring your dogs in here. I spoke of it to one of the students. He said modestly: "Yes; but who is there in college that can read it?" An old lady leaning on the arm of her daughter is toddling homewards at eve:

Daughter: Oh, mother, see that lovely star!

Mother (in a tone of gentle reproof): My dear! That is not a star. That is a planet. It is Jupiter.

A drayman has a suspicious bulge on his hip. Hooch? He pulls out what appears to be a pocket flask. The nerve of him! But he applies it not to his lips but to his eyes. Field glasses! The son of Jehu is squinting at birds. But there is more going on than would be signified by such things as these.

After listening somewhat idly to weeks of that cheerful babble which enlivens a student boarding-house, it suddenly dawned on me: Here is something new. What was it? This: These boys, perhaps unawares, were nevertheless speaking the language of modern economics more or less as a matter of course. At least they understood the bread-and-butter structure of modern society: how it is run; for whom and by whom, and who is footing the bills—the bills for their own education incidentally.

Nor is this confined to economics—economics is only an item in the liberalism which is gradually pervading the place. For some years—eight, to be exact—I had noticed that Amherst men seemed to yield a higher percentage of independent thinkers than the average run of college men. Living in Amherst I saw why. The effort there is less to pour facts into the gaping mouths of an assemblage of

jugs, and more to kindle the creative energies of young minds. This system may be, and to some extent is, taken advantage of for a country-club existence of loafing, gandering, and tennis. At its best, however, it produces something like this. . . . A young friend of mine remarks:

"My room-mate is in a state of wilt."

"Weather?" (The day was sultry.)

"No. A four-hour session with Ayres." (Professor of psychology.)

As it happened to be a legal holiday, I asked:

"Curriculum or extra-curriculum?"

"Extra."

"Is this a common occurrence in your crowd?"

"Quite."

I got the idea that several of them more or less haunted this professor's house; felt free to rout him out at all hours if they were seized with a bright idea which needed threshing out. Hours, classes, lessons, and so on had become irrelevant. This, I submit, is education.

Neither is it dissociated from humor. A noted divine had the misfortune to read Scripture at the college church in Anglican accents. Whereupon, as often as one of the fraternity brethren swerves up to the dormitory terrace resplendent in a Ford car, or appears in a new suit, you hear:

"Who is this king of gleaury?"

And an antiphonal voice will chant:

"The leaurd of heausts. He is the king of gleaury!"

Also, not devoid of humor at their own expense. Several of them, who are quite keen on philosophy, are so far from taking themselves too seriously as to wear tiny brass shovels on their watch chains, the emblem being symbolic of a most unflattering aspersion on their own volubility. When young men will crack ribald jokes at the expense of their own intellectual enthusiasms, their sanities are safe.

The ability to use their heads for more than barbers' laboratories shows in an episode of student self-government, which, while other colleges spend much time talking about it, Amherst is putting quietly to work. The undertakings drawn up by the students for themselves are extraordinary not so much for what they propose as for how they propose it. First you notice that they do not promise more than they can undertake to perform, but that they do undertake to perform what they promise, and, what is more, provide the means. Then you are struck by something novel. It is a certain vigor and confidence in the handling of the thought-material. It quite clearly denotes youth taught to think, speak, and act for itself—a beautiful thing, and the tune goes manly.

Again, if you like sensational news, here is some: in four successive years, the football captains have been members of the Phi Beta Kappa Society.

Such things ramify into the finer issues of life.

One day I was chaffing a Junior:

"You fellows in your knickerbockers, going bare-headed, in white soft shirts without neckties and with collars open at the throat, look like a race of young poets. Now, the next thing is to be a race of young poets."

The Junior eyed me coolly and replied: