

A BAD TRAVELLER

And She Hates Washing Dishes Too

TOO often when meeting the wives of famous men, one is forced to acknowledge a slight feeling of disappointment. And although this disappointment is usually found on closer acquaintance to be unwarranted, it is nevertheless satisfactory to find a wife who answers all one's expectations. Such a wife is Mrs. Friedman, wife of the famous Polish pianist.

A pianist herself, she satisfies all one's preconceived ideas about pianists and pianists' wives. She has temperament, the "artistic" temperament. She is full of wayward enthusiasms. Her presence is stimulating rather than soothing. And she loves laughing.

Mrs. Friedman is a Russian. Her husband is, of course, Polish. Their home is in Italy, in what used to be the Austrian Alps. But, as Mrs. Friedman says, what does it matter? Artists belong to no particular country—their country is the world. Her husband speaks nine languages. She herself speaks only four, Russian, German, Italian, French.

"English?" I asked

"No," she said, "I do not speak English. At least I do not call what I speak English."

Housekeeping Presents Difficulties

Mrs. Friedman has not seen her Italian home for three years, but hopes that after the war they will be able to go straight back there. "My dog—he is there, too. I have not seen him either for three years."

When the war started, the Friedmans were touring Europe. It so happened that they left both Holland and Norway a month before Hitler reached those countries. They have now settled for the duration of the war at Vacluse, a suburb of Sydney, overlooking the sea, where, says Mrs. Friedman, the wind blows, but not as much as it does in Wellington.

Housekeeping in Australia presents difficulties. "Until we left Europe," explained Mrs. Friedman, "I could not believe that it was possible to be without servants. When people told me there were no servants in Australia, I just laughed. I could not do without a servant. I had never done any housekeeping in my life. So I got a servant—and a succession of servants—but they did not serve me, I served them. Then I got a nice Russian girl, and I was very happy, but she was very Red, and would not go pink just for me. So now I have somebody to come in the mornings and wash the floors and the dishes—I hate washing dishes—and I do all my own cooking. I am quite a good cook now—I cook all the things my husband likes, and he would rather eat my food than eat in restaurants."

"Fatiguing and Distasteful"

All the same, Mrs. Friedman finds housekeeping "very fatiguing and extremely distasteful," and enjoys staying at hotels with her husband when he is on tour. And she loves New Zealand and

New Zealanders. "When I was in New Zealand two years ago, I went to many of your lovely places. And I thought that when I came to your country again I would explore every little corner of it. But alas! I am unable. There is only one thing I hate about your country—the railways. They sway from side to side—so, and from front to back—so. I am tossed about like when two children play with a ball. So if I cannot go in your nice motor-buses I will have to stay in one place. This time I am going to stay in your so lovely Rotorua and bath in those wonderful baths."

Mrs. Friedman, in spite of experience, is a bad traveller. "In peacetime, yes, in wartime, no," is her attitude. She told a harrowing story of her plane trip to New Zealand recently. Dreading air sickness, she got a preparation from her chemist to be taken three days before the trip. But unfortunately she misread the directions on the bottle, and instead of taking two teaspoonfuls, took two tablespoonfuls, with the result that she was sick not only on the plane but for three days beforehand. "And I still feel not so good," she confessed.

Art Versus Music

The Friedmans have one daughter, at present living in Switzerland. "I have not seen her for some time," said Mrs. Friedman. "She is married there, and has two small children."

I found it difficult to believe that anyone so youthful-looking could be the mother of a married daughter, and said so. Mrs. Friedman was delighted.

"You New Zealanders, you are so charming. You have paid me a compliment, is it not? But I must tell you about my daughter. She is beautiful, though I, her mother, should not say so. And she paints very well indeed."

"Does she play?"

"No, not now very much. I made her learn the piano till she was 15 years old. Every day I drove her to practice, and every day she made me desperate because she played so badly. I could not understand it. At last I was in despair. I said to her 'You need not play any more. I do not like hearing you.' And she leapt up from the piano stool and danced all around the room saying 'Maman, that is the nicest thing you have ever said to me!' At first I was very hurt, because my husband and I love music, and I could not understand that she did not love it, too. But then I realised that she was right. She had no interest in music at all. Instead she had inherited from my mother a talent for painting, and after, she was able to give herself completely to the work she loved. I am only sorry I did not realise it before."

"Do you paint, too?"

"No," I am interested almost solely in music. I am a pupil of my husband's. Often we practise together. I think the happiest moments of my life are those when we play duets on the two pianos in our music room at home."

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