

Journal/Travelogue of Charles OFFER, 4/1 -7/22/1888

San Francisco, CA to Huncovce, Slovakia and back!

Transcription of pp. 52-59, with corrections and added footnotes by Madeleine Isenberg

Vienna, May 12, 1888

Up the same as ever and getting ready to leave tomorrow the 13th for my father's house. When I got up this morning a personal message stuck on the door early this morning and who was it but the brother of my sister Julia's husband. His name is Arnold GRÜNWALD and has informed me of the great preparations which is made for my benefit at home. But nevertheless I have to stand it. During the whole day I and Grünwald have been walking around and talking matters over and also have received very important news which I will explain in person. I will drop that now and say again a few words about the city of Vienna and that is I am really sorry to leave Vienna for the reason I don't think there is another city in the world where life is carried on so free and easy as here – I may come back and stay here another few days. When I return home and I will be able to say a great deal about Vienna – will continue –

I had some washing done twice in Vienna and must say that it is a very poor washing and looks very miserable and (they) charge like the devil for it too.

The River of Blue Danube looks fine to me. My window is facing the river and looks to me like home again.

Vienna, May 13, 1888

My trunk did weigh 80 lbs. weight and (I) bought a ticket for Poprad Felka where my father's home is, and they have charged me 5 Fl.40x¹ overcharge and my personal ticket 19 Fl. 38x. Just see what an outrage it is for 80 lb, baggage to charge a man 5Fl. 40x overcharge.

It is a sight to see the ladies conducting the water closets at the depots. When a man comes and wants to go to a closet, the lady runs at him and asks him, "Do you wish to stand up or do you wish to sit down?" It is a sight. Price 5x to 10x.

The porter in the Metropole Hotel pays 4000 Fl to the proprietor per year as to hold the position. He has to make it all from *Trinkgelt* (i.e, tips). These ... Vienna.

But I will say this much that I don't think that in my travel through Europe that I will get into another city where life is as conducted as Vienna; it beats anything I have ever seen. It is something that nobody can explain. Will continue

Vienna, May 13, 1888

Pulling out from Vienna to Poprad Felka to father's home. The whole day I did not, could not, eat anything for (because of) excitement. When the conductor came in for tickets he looked at me and ticket and says, "My friend, you have a very long journey on hand." All it is, is a 9 hour ride. It shows that people are not traveling such distances here in this country.

Going along nicely till Sent Micklash (St. Mikulas). Leaving on a Sunday arrived at above station and train stopped for 4 minutes sharp being a town of about 500 Jewish families and I swear that every Jew and Jewess and child was at the depot and Rabiner SINGER² has received me and introduced the 5 Affen³ and grandmother. And in those 4 minutes I have shook hands with everyone at the crowded depot. And if it would last another 4 minutes my right hand would be swollen from shaking and had to get an artificial arm. Promised to Rabiner Singer on my return to stop over and get all particulars. Rabbi SINGER is a fine educated gentleman in every respect. Train pulled out and handkerchiefs were waving by the 100. From there it takes 2 hours more to Poprad Felka where the last station is where my father and others met me. The train arrived at Poprad Felka at 6:30PM and stops only 2 minutes. I had to get out and stand on the platform. Have seen father but he did not see me. I could not move and stood still for about 3 minutes before I was able to go to him, and as to say, when we did meet, it is something that cannot be explained. He fell to my feet and I was ashamed of myself and other people had to pick him up from the ground and only then we kissed each other.

My sisters and brothers and other relations were there and finally my mouth really was sore (from kissing). The whole town of Hunsdorf and Kesmark was at the depot to see the Trained Bear from California and to see the meeting with my father.

We took 2 carriages and went home to Hunsdorf. When we arrived at Hunsdorf and got to father's house the streets was (were) black with people and by going from the carriages to the house there was a line of people on each side and I went through the middle and everybody raising their heads. I never in my whole life have seen such ignoramuses as there. Everybody raised their heads and looking at me.

We had supper and everybody peeping in the window as to take a glance at me. We have been chatting together until 2 o'clock and then went to bed.

Hunsdorf, May 15, 1888

Up at 7 o'clock have taken breakfast and then went to my mother's grave and every poor man or woman followed me in the line. Arrived there found a very nice stone on my mother's grave and it was a very sad affair. I can assure you there was considerable praying going on and we all done considerable crying and left there for father's home again.

We had then dinner and then took a carriage and myself, father, sisters, and brother went to Luchivna. There is an uncle and aunt of mine (the aunt) which looks like my mother. Arrived there and remained there overnight and we had another turn of a crying layout. Up to this very minute there was nothing else but crying and crying. Went to bed about 12 o'clock. The uncle's name is M. GOLDFINGER.

Luchivna, May 16, 1888

Up at 6 o'clock had breakfast and another crying spells and left for Kesmark to my sister Luisa RUSNACK. We remained there until 20th May. Being holidays Shvues (Shavuot) we had to go to the temple. The first day got in the temple you ought to (have) seen how they all stared at me. I had the honor to receive Maftir⁴ from the Rabbi and it cost me 62 FL. Went home about 12 o'clock, had our dinner and about 1 o'clock

the crowds came and commenced to gather to see the hippopotamus. The room where the admiring part was done held very near(ly) 40 people. The room was full at all times and people were standing in the doorway and hallway trying to push themselves in. Several men want(ed) to get out to make room for the ladies and could not push himself (themselves) through the crowd and had to jump out the window.

They was (were) really a nice set of people. The Rabbi and other educated people came prepared with speeches only for the occasion and tears have been rolling from all parts (of) the house. [So many] questions had been asked that I was really tired out and worn out. So finally the day had passed.

The next day holiday went to the temple again and in the afternoon we had again the same layout of visitors till 10 o'clock PM. In the evening I was hoarse from talking and could not talk louder than a whisper. But Thank G-d that past (passed). Kesmark is a city of about 8000 inhabitants and I was ashamed to go through the streets. Everybody and anybody came looking and (at) me as if they have never seen a human before. There was (were) really some ladies and gentlemen of intelligence which have been trying their best to get introduced to me in order, if nothing else, only to shake hands. And many of them said, if nothing else, I am very proud that I can say that I have shaken (shook) hands with a man what comes from the other end of the world as that [there]has never been here yet as long as Kesmark is in existence, that a man from San Francisco ever came through here. Wherever I stepped people was (were) running out of their business places and pointing out with their fingers, so as if I would be the Majesty of Vienna or in other words when a circus parade passes through the street it would not make such a stir among the people.

Of course by giving a little sketch of these, (it) is simple to show how dumb and ignorant the people are here yet and are only counting 1588 instead of 1888. I can assure you in many cases I was ashamed of myself. Nobody in California can form an idea of it how a person will feel in such a case.

Kesmark, May 20, 1888

We all left in the morning after the Holidays and went to Hunsdorf, a distance of about 2 miles. Being Friday we had to get there before Saturday (Shabbat) -- remained there until Monday morning. This part of the country is a very religious country and that is the reason that the majority of the people are starving and none of them has a decent suit of cloth(es) to put on. Friday evening of course we went to the temple and then home for supper. Then the fracas all commenced and already in the evening and people begin to come to see the free show. Kept up till 12 o'clock.

Hunsdorf, May 21, 1888

Up as usually and of course went to church (temple!). Got again Maftir and donated 50 Fl for renovating the temple and 10 Fl for the grave yards. Total I have donated 60 Fl., the same as in Kesmark. Home from church (temple) had our stale 2nd hand dinner which was cooked a day previous, and the crowds commenced to ... on again and asking me very ignorant questions which was very sickening to me – but still I was an exhibition and I had to answer them to the best of my knowledge. One man asked me if the sun and moon shines in California. One man asked me if we have got already horses; the other asked me how we can tell the time of day and so far(forth) and so far (forth). I tell you there was some very spicey questions asked that kept up the whole afternoon Saturday and the whole day Sunday and was worn out ready to drop.

Hunsdorf, May 22, 1888

From there we left at 6 AM for Straczina a distance of about 40 miles we had carriages and took us a whole day to get there, as they feed their horses here every two hours by the watch. My sister Carolina MEYER lives there and really on my whole entire trip I found a good rest there being only an iron foundry and a few houses, no Jews leaving (living) there, and being a very mountainous country and very romantic in every way. With these people what leaves (lives) here, they could not talk with me on account that they are all Slavonians and that language I could not talk. Therefore, I had a good rest, was playing cards a whole day with father and other relatives. We remained there fully 8 days until May 29th

1888. The 27th day of May we all went to a place called Eishähle , in English, Ice Cafe. It cost 2 Fl. admission. It is a most wonderful thing I or good many people never seen or can form an idea unless a person can see it. We remained there until 4 PM and went home again to sister Carolina, being only a distance of 1 mile. The expense was 25 Fl. for the ice cafe visit.

On the 29th day of May, we left Straczina again with 2 carriages and we all left in a body again for Kesmark to sister Luisa. Coming about half way a little accident happened to us that a horse broke a leg and dropped at once. Of course it had nothing to do with me but only with the owner of the horse, but only it made us all feel bad as we had no other horse in his place and could not get one for 2 miles ... to come. But by considerable trouble we managed to get through the best way we could. Got in to Kesmark at 4 PM and remained there until June 1, 1888.

Kesmarok, June 1, 1888

Left at 6 o'clock in the morning for St. Micklash (Mikulas), myself, Carolina, Luisa, and father to see the Remained there over night and we all left next day to Budapest.

Must say before going any further when we got to Poprad Felka RR Station, there was a crowd of people there to see me off. If any, there was (were) at least 300 people; people looking at me like they have never seen a person before and everybody was trying his very best to try to talk to me or to touch my close (clothes). Then (the) train left and you and nobody else can have a idea how people carried on.

Train left Poprad Felka at 10 AM, arrived at St. Micklash at 12 PM. How in G-d's Almighty world they found out that I am coming I cannot tell and the excitement that there was at the depot is something I cannot explain. Not alone (only) relations but every Jahud (Jew) was there from the town shaking hands with me. We remained there 24 hours and met with very wealthy relatives, and when I took a walk through the streets, people rushing out through the houses just to take a look at me. In the meantime the people in St. Micklash are more of intelligent class of people than in Hunsdorf, Kemark, or anywhere else.

I have been at Rabbiner SINGER and had quite a long conversation with him and you ought to (have) seen how he has received me and what kind of fuss he has made with me. I have received more honors in St. Micklash than Grant, ex-President, in Stockton.

One of my relations, his name is Adolf EICHHORN, he took me to his house in the evening and got a band of 15 musik pieces (musicians) and kept them their till 2 o'clock in the morning and there was quite a gathering of people and champagne was poured one bottle after the other and must say it was a grand time all around.

Lipto St. Micklash (Liptovský Svätý Mikuláš), June 2, 1888,

Up in the morning about 7 o'clock went to all of them saying goodbye. Coming along by 11 o'clock and we had to make for the depot. There was (were) 6 carriages subject to our order and we left for the depot with a crowd of people. Everybody from the town was there and kisses were passed to me that really my lips was (were) sore. Train left and tears was (were) shed by everybody at the depot.

Arrived this same day at Budapest at 10 PM and what do you think? The relations of St. Micklas telegraphed to Budapest and there we was (were) received again by a big crowd of relations and Hurrah all over again. And again hotel carriages was (were) provided for. Remained in Budapest the 3rd & 4th of June and have taken in all the sights there was to be taken in and had lots of fun with my two green sisters which never was in a big city. Budapest is a very nice big lively city . But comparatively speaking it is only a corner to Vienna. Vienna is *the* city in Europe so far I have seen.

¹ An x represents the "Kreuzen" or Crosses, which are the fractions of a Florin. Presumably, an x was used, since this represents a cross.

² Rabbi Benjamin Wolf (Zeev) SINGER, 1855-1930). See <http://fisher.library.utoronto.ca/sites/default/files/singer596.pdf>

³ His handwriting was often difficult to discern. His descendent, Stuart OFFER, suggested he may have used the German word, Affen, meaning monkeys, as a reference to the little children.

⁴ Jan Gurnik, amateur historian in Hunsdorf, had some of the pages from a book written by Rabbi Dr. Armin SCHNITZER, "Judische Kultur Bilder," printed in Vienna, 1904. In it Rabbi Schnitzer indicates that having the honor of a *maftir*, was something people tended to talk about, as in "Who had *maftir* last week?" What they really wanted to know was how much did the honoree give as a donation for this honor? In the travelogue, we see that Charles Offer, does specifically note what he paid for this honor.