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The Viennese Prodigy.

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THE LIVING AGE

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over the two countries were desirable it would mean the abandonment of the Mufti, who is not only Ibn Saud's friend, but who is also a useful restraint on certain unruly young Arab elements in Palestine. And again, where could compensation for the Arab Conqueror be found? Saudi Arabia's expansion toward the north is quite out of the question, because in that direction it borders upon Syria and Iraq, which are respectively French and English spheres of influence. Yet to give the Wahabis a free hand in the south, in the Yemen, would be energetically opposed by Italy. Rome only recently gave an unmistakable indication of its interest in protecting the independence of this richest part of Arabia, which lies just across the Red Sea from Italy's East African Empire.

Abdullah has been invited to attend the coronation of George VI. He will be greeted, as in 1935, with a royal salute of twenty-one guns. But his own prospects of being the central figure of a coronation are far from promising, even if he should be clever enough to continue to try to unite the interests of the Jews with those of the Arabs who favor him. Abdullah's destiny seems to be one of waiting and waiting and waiting.

THE VIENNESE PRODIGY

By KLAUS MANN

Translated from the *Pariser Tageszeitung*, Paris German-Emigré Daily

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ROSWITHA BITTERLICH is an unusually talented young painter. She is the daughter of Dr. Hans M. Bitterlich, an Austrian official, and was born in Bregenz on the Bodensee in 1920. So she is now about seventeen years of age. A short biography, which is included in the catalogue of her works, tells us that her paintings and sketches were first publicly exhibited in Innsbruck, in 1932. In 1935 her first great exposition was held in the Vienna Crystal Palace—an exposition that was formally opened, according to the catalogue, 'by the Austrian Chancellor, Dr. Schuschnigg, and which found enthusiastic response from the press. In May and August, 1936, equally successful exhibitions took place in Prague and Salzburg.'

At present the paintings and drawings of this phenomenal child are the sensation of Amsterdam. One is compelled to use the word 'sensational' to describe the passionate public interest, especially on the part of women, which Roswitha's work arouses. No other living painter, not even Picasso, now draws such crowds to a gallery.

pure colleagues. The prices that are paid even for her minor drawings and sketches are said to be substantial.

When I visited the Bitterlich Exhibition, crowds stood before some of the more startling paintings, whispering animatedly and respectfully. Strange types were among Roswitha's admirers; they reminded me somewhat of anthroposophic and theosophic gatherings or of evangelistic meetings in America. Hyper-emotional middle-aged women were much in evidence; and I noticed young girls whose pallor and glittering eyes pointed to religious hysteria. Youths of the aesthete type with fashionably unkempt hair were also present. Somehow the middle-aged women as well as the young men and the girls seemed capable of experiencing the state of ecstasy in which Roswitha, I suspect, sometimes finds herself when she paints. All of them seemed in a peculiar way able to appreciate and enjoy the achievements of this highly imaginative girl.

But there were also skeptics in the crowd. I heard them conjecture that somebody had lent a helping hand on several of Roswitha's pictures; some even doubted that the best pictures were done by her at all.

I should like to emphasize that I regard such conjectures as pure nonsense. Certainly Roswitha has done everything herself. Her distinctive touch is easily recognizable through all her stylistic changes and varying themes. It is exactly this restlessness, this somewhat hectic swaying between the extremes—between the grotesque and the beautiful, between the blasphemous and the religious, between the delicate and the coarse—which seems to me particularly characteristic of an immature, extremely receptive and almost frighteningly imaginative temperament.

Some pictures—nightmares really—are remarkably impressive. Others remind one of the stiff yet sweet loveliness of Italian Quattrocento madonnas, for instance, the oil painting entitled *Legend* in which a charming Virgin Mary, surrounded by all sorts of strange types, occupies a little boat. There are other works in a somewhat affected Gothic style; still others are frolicsome caricatures which often show a real sense of humor, like the grotesque picture called *Funeral Feast*. Some pictures are done in the rococo style, some in an abstract philosophical vein.

Finally there are fairy tales and dreams, and these last seem to me Picasso's best, purest and most successful. I was particularly enchanted by a little sketch, *The Call of the Forest*, which depicts a legendary youth, that animal half man, sounding an almost audible call, plaintive and

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colleagues. The prices that are paid even for her minor drawings and sketches are said to be substantial.

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Such romantic pictures support my contention that Roswitha Bit-

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terlich's phenomenal talent is primarily that of a poet rather than that of a painter. Much of her power to fascinate lies in her imagination—perhaps I should say in her literary imagination. The titles of her pictures are literary, and sometimes even journalistic, for example, *Must I Die After All?*, *Stop Getting Drunk!*, *Pickanniny and Giraffe*, *The Banquet of Death*, *Withered Beauty* and *Angel with the Bowl of Wrath*. Dramatic and speculative imagination predominate over color. In fact, the colors on her canvases do not glow; they seem to be laid on without zest.

Roswitha Bitterlich is a girl enraptured and tortured by visions lovely and evil, religious and rebellious, tender and cruel. One might almost call her imagination pathological. It seems to me that in her short life she has read extensively and observed a great deal. Certainly the visions of others are mingled with her own. The impression made by observing her work is twofold. While one is fascinated and impressed, one is also repelled.

Ballyhoo about a child is always dangerous: adults are not ashamed to take advantage of genius. The public reacts kindly; it is more interested in this ecstatic young girl than in a mature artist, just as in America people think more of the drolleries of Shirley Temple than of a really great actress. The careers of both Shirley and Roswitha—so different from each other—are carried onward by the same public adulation. Roswitha Bitterlich is a prodigy; so much can be granted. A judgment as to whether she is more—a true genius—must wait.

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