

PREFACE

"Full of good cheer, his meager rucksack holding a number of hard earned coins saved from his wages as a journeyman, a young man walked into Vienna around 1818 with the intention and with the conviction of being able to make his 'fortune' here."

This is how Ludwig Lobmeyr (1829 – 1917) begins his autobiography, which has been preserved in manuscript form by the company. The Viennese glass industrialist, for whom glass was "more beautiful than rock crystal," was encouraged to write down this record towards the end of the 19th century by his friend Friedrich Pecht. In it he tells about the life of his father Josef Lobmeyr, the opening of a glass business, his own childhood and youth and above all about the fate of the famous company, J. & L. Lobmeyr, in the second half of the 19th century.

It also takes up the difficulties with the Slavonic glass works and the resulting prolonged court case against his Hungarian partner Hondl. Travels take up a lot of space, many made in connection with visiting and taking part in exhibitions. Lobmeyr describes in detail the close contacts with the Austrian Museum for Art and Industry (founded in 1864), its director Rudolf von Eitelberger and the leading Viennese artists. Important personalities in Vienna's cultural life gathered for "social evenings" at the Lobmeyr's. And Lobmeyr also deals with personal situations; his relationships with women and friends and his numerous visits to health spas. He also mentions his picture collection and his acquaintance with famous painters of the time, among them, Alt, Pettenkofen, Spitzweg and Munkácsy.

This publication contains the transcription of this document written in a foreign hand, in its full length even though readers might consider some passages tedious and dispensable. It seemed to me inadvisable to alter this total view Ludwig Lobmeyr presented of his life and work by making arbitrary changes. The wonderful task fell to me to accompany this journey through more than a half century with illustrations taken from the rich treasures in the company's museum and the archives of the J. & L. Lobmeyr company in Vienna. In addition to glass objects, working drawings and paper patterns there are also contemporary photographs reproduced here. They give us the unique possibility to see entire drinking and dessert services and also extensive glass series.

I see the time when Josef Lobmeyr led the company (from 1823 until his death in 1855) as a very important phase. Ludwig Lobmeyr describes this period which he knew from stories told to him and from his own experiences. It also appears to me to be so important because the drawings in the company archives from this time spread out a panorama of Biedermeier glass before us unlike anything ever seen before.

Josef Lobmeyr was a widely traveled and capable businessman. Without doubt, he was one of the people who knew the contemporary glass industry best and was able to show his public an extensive selection of glasses very soon, as the two surviving business cards from the early period prove.

Orders based on samples that took the form of existing glasses or paper patterns, chiefly went to the centers of the Bohemian glass industry. In the beginning Lobmeyr was dependent on what they had to offer, but he probably developed his own ideas at a very early stage. They led to a remarkable selection that included all the successful glasses whatever their origins. The extensiveness of this selection demanded a well thought-out system of classification for the various types of shapes and services. Faced with the long, narrow folders of drawings and patterns for drinking glasses and dessert services and the types of shapes of various glasses, we discover a previously unsuspected variety which makes it possible – in many respects – to gain a new view of Biedermeier glass.

Included in this are the production drawings of previously unknown dessert services, dated with the year 1835 and signed by Josef Lob-

meyr. Another important find is made up of production drawings by J. C. Bauer. They have survived partially in the form of paper patterns, and partially as fragmented drawings on the backs of paper patterns that were re-used and cut up for new purposes. The drinking and dessert services from the time of Josef Lobmeyr are exceptionally valuable for scholarly research. A series of letters and numbers label the services for identification. After his death these were incorporated into a new system of numbering. During this process many of the older services were naturally disregarded. This resulted in the erroneous opinion that the (more recent) numbering was complete and included all the services made by the Lobmeyr company during that time.

The autobiography itself is introduced by a commentary by Friedrich Pecht, who contributes greatly to defining Ludwig Lobmeyr's personality. If it appears that the volume of pictures illustrating the contemporary Lobmeyr text is very extensive, one must keep in mind that this is still only a small area in the overall production of "Lobmeyr Glass." The company's 175th anniversary was celebrated in 1998 in Vienna as the "Lobmeyr Year" with numerous activities: changing exhibitions in the company's own museum were devoted to specific themes (customers of the Lobmeyr company, wine glasses, mirrored designs and production). In a jubilee publication of its own ("Lobmeyr 1823 – Bright Glass, Clear Light") members of the Rath family in 1998 portrayed the company history of the House of Lobmeyr, expanding on the Lobmeyr monograph by Robert Schmidt which appeared in 1925. It brings the story up to the present and also includes the production of chandeliers.

The Austrian Postal Savings Bank devoted its 1998 summer exhibition to the Lobmeyr theme, "Surpassing the Beauty of Rock Crystal" for which I undertook the scholarly supervision. This publication is also to be regarded as being connected with this exhibition. At present the project, "J. & L. Lobmeyr, Glasses and Production Drawings" is being carried out with the support of the Austrian Science Fund, Vienna (project director: Waltraud Neuwirth, scientific research: Ulrike Scholda). This is enabling the objects owned by the Austrian Museum for Applied Arts to be researched and a comprehensive Lobmeyr bibliography to be produced.

As with all my projects, I would like to express my warmest thanks to all the many people and institutions who have helped and supported me:

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Waltraud Neuwirth