

THE ASHBOURNE FAMILY SAGA

CHAPTER XIV

and

Saucy Sophia's Snippets plus trailer for next month.

June, 2024.

Winter evolved into spring and Edward had now spent the last five months at the Imperial Admiralty in Berlin, and resided at Herr Hans Hoffmann's residence in the Grunwald, that exclusive forested area which stretched from the western outskirts of Berlin to the Wannsee, and beyond the great lake to the Imperial country estate of Potsdam. Edward now found himself wondering what he had expected, he had some knowledge of maritime affairs from his service in the merchant marine, but none whatsoever in the Royal Navy. If his Imperial masters had expected to learn some of the naval procedures and other sensitive information from him, although they had not exhibited and signs of curiosity, they would have been sadly disappointed. Edward's knowledge of the Admiralty in Whitehall extended no further than could be gleaned from the newspapers and periodicals freely available.

The Kaiserliche Marine of the 1880's was very much the junior to the Deutsches Heer, the army, mainly because military planning was more concerned with the land threat from France to the west and Russia to the east, especially following Petersburg's decision not to renew the League of the Three Emperors in 1887. Whilst the lands of the German Empire, which stretched from German Lithuania in the north east to Alsace and Lorraine in the west, and from the duchess of Schleswig Holstien in the north to Neuschwanstein in southern Bavaria some miles short of the frontier with Austria in the south, were experiencing a significant revival in economic fortune following removal of trade barriers and customs tax collection by the governments of the numerous previously independent kingdoms, grand dukedoms, and city states which had formed the patchwork of Germanic countries; there was, within those elements of the population given to thinking that the prosperous state of affairs could not continue.

From a German perspective, their manufacturing capacity had increased enormously, but with large sectors of the globe beyond the Continent and the United States dominated by Great Britain and France, plus albeit of less significance, the Belgians, Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese, there were insufficient foreign markets available, or so many believed.

Since the establishment of the Empire in 1871 Germany had achieved significant success, but nevertheless, always rather the "Johnny come lately." Colonies had been acquired in Africa, namely Deucher Sud Westafrika (now Numidia) Camerons, Tanganika, and a minor presence in Japan.

The Chancellor, Graf Otto von Bismark was not in favour of obtaining colonies, stating that the cost of acquisition, defending and administering far outweighed their commercial and financial value. The smaller the empire the fewer warships required for

its defence, and thus the smaller the Imperial Navy compared to those of France and Great Britain. All this Edward had discovered since his arrival in Berlin. On the surface all was brimming with success, especially since the establishment of the Universal Postal Service initiated by Heinrich von Stephan in 1878, but of immediate portent there was the health of the Kaiser Wilhelm now in his 90's, and whilst he had enjoyed a robust constitution, his strength was clearly waning. If the Crown Prince had enjoyed his father's wellbeing all would have been well, but sadly this was not to be. It was known that he was gravely ill, possibly dying, though the details had not been disclosed by the Palace.

Edward was very fortunate being an easy-going chap with a sunny disposition. He seemed to take comfort in being the second son, whilst George, his elder brother, had effectively assumed control of the family business, and the enjoyment of its profit, he also had the worry and concern for its continued profitability. The firm built and maintained light carriages and George was not unaware of the potential threat to the business from developments refining the internal combustion engine. Grandfather had, on many occasions, talked of the stagecoaches and Royal Mail coaches which criss-crossed the country in his younger days, with Coaching Inns, Taverns and Ale Houses approximately every fifteen miles along the main roads to supply a change of horses. Now, thanks to the railways, many of them but a shadow of their former bustling activity.

Since his arrival in Berlin in early January 1888 Edward had been employed at the offices of the Imperial Navy, where initially his time had been occupied with the soul-destroying task of checking and adding columns of figures for numerous goods supplied to the naval dockyards at Danzig, Kiel, and Wilhelmshaven. He became thoroughly disillusioned and contemplated resigning, he could return to Lansdorf in East Prussia, go to sea again, or go home to Western-under-Penyard, but Fate or the Wheel of Fortune had other ideas and dealt another card. He was transferred to another department.

Here he acted as assistant to Lieutenant Dorf whose responsibilities involved visits to the dockyards, examining the work in hand and its progress. Reports were prepared on the current condition of ships at the dockyards, and the dockyard's success or otherwise of achieving maintenance, construction and/or repairs according to the expected time allowed. It was interesting work and enabled Edward to greatly extend his knowledge of shipping, although at this stage he followed Herr Dorf taking extensive notes which were then compiled into reports for Kapitän Johann Schwartz, the head of the department.

There were other young hopefuls at the offices of the Imperial Navy as the administration was gradually expanded to meet the requirements of the enlarged navy. Forming a loose group five usually, depending on availability, and by tacit agreement they all met for luncheon at Frau Gruber's Speisesaal located in a nearby side street not far from Friedrichstraße Bahnhof. Frau Gruber herself surveyed her establishment from the vantage point of an elevated cash desk situated within panelling on three sides, but only some five inches above the desktop. This provided privacy whilst the proprietress could exercise control of her staff and customers. To the customers she was always extremely courteous, respectful, and polite.

The bill of fare was always good quality and appetising, but there were house rules which were strictly enforced, and Frau Gruber retained the services of an ex-sergeant of the 2nd Guards Grenadiers to ensure compliance. No quarrelling was allowed, or angry voices, and single or unaccompanied ladies were strictly verboten. She was not going to allow the good name of her *esszimmer* (eating room) to be sullied by those attempting to sell their favours to her customers. Nevertheless, Mrs Gruber was by no means insensitive to the weaknesses of her almost exclusively male patrons. The *kellnerinnen* (waitresses) were all young and attractive, with nature's benefits in just the right proportions. Dressed in *Dirndl* dresses which artfully displayed the house colours, white blouse, black laced over blouse and red skirts, also the colours of the imperial flag, they floated about graciously attending to the customers requests. When caressed by a customer, a patted bottom, or hand on her arm, the girl would smile sweetly and just carry on.



Portrait of Frau Gruber from Frau Gruber's Speisesaal

After Edward had commenced employment at the naval offices, he was introduced to some of the staff, in the drawing office he met a serious looking young chap, one Anton Fuchs who asked Edward if he knew that kissing a girl would take a day off his life in a deeply concerned tone of voice, waiting a few seconds, though it seemed longer, he then in a most jovial voice and gleefully rubbing his hands together exclaimed, "Roll on early death!" They became good friends, and Anton insisted that Edward join him and others for lunch. Anton Fuchs, the son of a medical doctor hailed from Hanover and was the comedian of the group, forever disclaiming jokes. The others marvelled at his seemingly endless supply and his ability to recall just the right witticism for the moment. His parents had wished him to follow his father, but Anton could not be deterred from his love of ships and the sea.

There were others Edward came to know, namely Heinrich Bauer, from the Kingdom of Wurttemberg, the son of a manufacturer specialising in chemicals/pharmacy, who had attended the *Kolleg St. Blasien*, originally established in 1307; Caspar Janssen, a graduate of the Palatine Academy of Sciences in Mannheim, founded in 1763. Caspar's parents were however disappointed, named after the artist Caspar David Friedrich young Caspar Janssen was incapable of displaying any artistic talent whatsoever. The

others included Horst Meckel who had attended the Universität zu Berlin established in 1809 and Otto Pfisterer who talked of little else than his vision for unterseeboote (submarines) arguing that if the Confederates could employ them in the 1860's then the navy should try developing one now over twenty years later. There was also the artist fellow Eugen Baader, not in the service but who had attached himself to their group. His forte was marine art and his drawings and paintings of life at sea were superb.

Edward found himself welcomed into the group, and they appreciated his mastery of their language even though he did speak Deutsch with a Lithuanian accent. He enjoyed their company, and in the evenings, Edward would let it be known at the house in the Grunwald that at least twice a week he would not be returning for dinner, preferring to dine with his new friends. The fashionable restaurants along Kurfürstendamm were a great favourite, though rather expensive, and Edward did not always allow his exuberance to rule his purse. An unusual feature of some of the young gentleman, or so Edward thought arose from a deep scar on one or both cheeks and he was to soon discover that these disfigurements were prized symbols of their manhood, prowess and chivalry, the result of duelling, though sometimes self-inflicted.

One lunch time at Frau Gruber's café the group started discussing war memorials, afterwards Edward seemed to remember that this had been occasioned by there not being, to their collective recollection, any memorials to naval battles whereas there were plenty to land engagements. The Herefordshire lad kept quiet and listened. He was very pleased he had when someone mentioned the Victory Column in front of the Reichstag, adding that it had been erected after the war with Denmark of 1864. Edward had thought it commemorated the 1870 victory over France, he must say silent, if he only thought he knew, in future.

Evenings at the restaurants and cafes along Kurfürstendamm were a very different affair, especially when Heinrich Bauer, the son of a wealthy manufacturer from Wurttemberg, was present. His confidence overflowed and it seemed there was nothing that he would fail to accomplish, from seducing the prettiest girl in the restaurant to rising to flag officer rank in the navy. Whenever Heinrich was present there was always a flock of young ladies eager for their company, and young Heinrich had money to spend, some enviously thought he was made of marks. It seemed that Herr Bauer could not put a foot wrong, tall with muscular strength, but very far from overweight, his blond hair and bright, almost piercing blue eyes, very few young ladies could resist him, and he seemed to know just how to charm the girls, with just the right degree of flattery. The whole lively atmosphere of evenings with his colleagues from the Admiralty on the Kurfürstendamm, Edward discovered, could be too much, too much champagne, too much schnapps and too late in the evening, or more likely, the early hours of the following day, left him exhausted and having great difficulty rising the following morning for the office. He wondered how the others managed it all, without betraying symptoms of fatigue.

For some weeks now there had been speculation, based more on lack of knowledge than anything else, that the health of their aged kaiser was failing. The palace were not given to reporting private details of the imperial family, but at the age of ninety Kaiser Wilhelm was not likely to live for many more years. Then on Saturday the 10th March Edward read in the Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung a report of the death of the Emperor the previous day, Friday the 9th March. Edward had assumed, he came to realise, that as

with the Queen Empress there was no one less than say sixty years of age who could remember a time when Victoria had not been Queen, and that the same applied to Kaiser Wilhelm. He was therefore surprised to read in the obituary columns and memorial publications that Kaiser Wilhelm Friedrich Ludwig von Preußen, the second son of King Friedrich Wilhelm II and the beautiful Frederica Louise of Mecklenburg-Strelitz had reigned for only twenty seven years.



Queen Fredrica Louise of Prussia.

There had not been any expectation that Prinz Wilhelm would ascend the throne and when their father died in 1840 his elder brother became King Friedrich Wilhelm IV. Born in 1795 he was only two years older than Wilhelm, but he remained a Bachelor and died on the 2nd January, 1861, having suffered poor health since a stroke in 1858. Thus, contrary to expectations, Wilhelm became King Wilhelm of Prussia in 1861, and Kaiser of Germany in 1871.

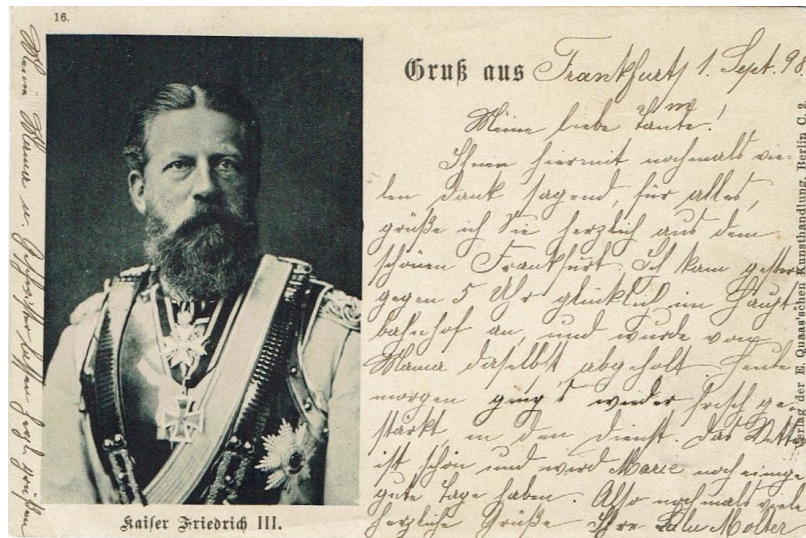


Kaiser Wilhelm I, complete with “Piccadilly Whispers” either side of his face, very fashionable at the time.

From the newspapers Edward also learnt that the late kaiser had served in the army from 1814 onward, and thus from the age of seventeen he took part in the campaigns of the Sixth Coalition or as it is known in Germany the Befreiungskriege (Wars of Liberation) to defeat the Great Disturber. In February 1814 Prinz Wilhelm participated in the Battle at Bar-sur-Aube, a tributary of the Seine south of Paris where he was awarded the Iron Cross and promoted to Hauptmann (Captain).

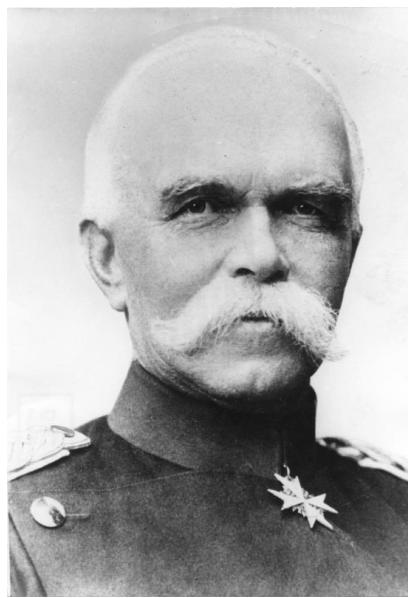
Prinz Wilhelm saw action again when Napoleon returned to France from the Isle of Elba the following year, and now promoted to major he commanded a battalion of the 1st Garderegiment, and serving under the command of Marschall Gebhard Leberecht von Blücher at the Battles of Ligny and Waterloo. There was much more including conducting his sister Charlotte to Saint Petersburg for her marriage to the future Czar Nicholas in 1817.

Now with the matter of the succession there was a problem. The late kaiser's eldest son, the Kronprinz Friedrich, married to Kronprinzessin Victoria, eldest of Queen Victoria's children was dying. On holiday at San Remo he suffered from a severe sore throat, thought to be the onset of a common cold, but the sore throat not only persisted but became much worse. On returning to Berlin various surgeons had been consulted to no avail. The Crown Princess always maintained a regular correspondence with her mother, and the Queen sent her personal physician to Berlin. There were differences of medical opinion; the physician recommended cauterising the larynx, an incredible painful surgical procedure, which failed to cure the patient.



Kaiser Friedrich III

During his time at the Admiralty Edward, though briefly, met the officer in overall command, Vice Admiral Leo von Caprivi, who was kind enough to enquire after the young officer's progress in his chosen career.



Vice Admiral Graf Leo von Caprivi.

The young Englishman found himself emotionally divided between a charming young *junge damen* he had come to know through the escapades with his friends from the Admiralty, just as Alexandra foresaw in January when he departed for Berlin with her aunt and family. It was not that Edward had intentionally sought intimate feminine company, he was in love with Alexandra and wrote to her at least once a week, and sometimes twice, but rather that Yolanda, for that was the young ladies name, seemed to come to life in his presence. She was everything Alexandra had feared, not quite beautiful, but very pretty, sweet, charming, vivacious, and very loving as Edward was to discover.



Das Unter den Linden, Berlin.

In early June, just as the trees lining the Unter den Linden (under the limes) the avenue of lime trees in the fashionable part of Berlin between the Brandenburg Tor and the bridge spanning the Spree near the Royal Palace, were coming into bloom, Edward took Yolanda to the Kroll Theatre to see a performance of *la Traviata*. It had not been Edward's intention to take Yolanda out for the evening, two tickets had been purchased so he could take Frau Klara by way of a thank you for kindly providing for him, a room in their house etc., while Hans was away on naval business, but somehow, he had failed to find the right moment to ask her. Meanwhile, Yolanda had been particularly attentive the previous evening, no not just the previous evening, on the Kurfürstendamm and at luncheon at Frau Gruber's café, and as there would be a spare ticket he had asked her. She agreed with much enthusiasm immediately.

Now, seated in the stalls, Yolanda snuggled up to Edward, her silky blond hair beautifully coiffured in the latest fashion which set off her perfect pink flesh and sparkling blue eyes to perfection. Other patrons of the arts, seeing the pair, would have

taken them for an engaged couple shortly to be married. The stage curtains parted, and Giuseppe Verdi's opera commenced, based on Alexandre Dumas' novel "The Lady of the Camellias."



Yolanda.

Edward had not previously seen the opera, had he done so he may have been a little more circumspect taking this passionate young lady to see a performance whose title *la Traviata* translates into English as the fallen woman or in German as *die gefallene Frau*. Clearly Yolanda had not seen *la Traviata* before, or if she had, she was a superb actress.

The production was perfect, and the casting for the part of Violetta could not have been improved upon, so supremely did she perform in the drinking song scene, and at the conclusion her dying of consumption so realistic that there were few dry eyes in the auditorium.

Waiting in the queue for Yolanda's cape while she visited the ladies room it dawned on Edward that with such forwardness on Yolanda's part, he should be careful what he was doing. Is it a matter of "fools rush in where angels fear to tread", or should he take advantage of whatever is on offer? "Strike while the iron is hot." He was in a quandary, but tongues wag and it could ruin his prospects at the Admiralty if Alexandra's uncle discovered what he had been up to. He also wondered why he was bothering, but he did not want to be the cause of grief as far as Alexandra and her family were concerned.

On the steps to the theatre, he was fortunate to secure a cab with the help of a footman and generous tip. Yolanda was reluctant to divulge her home address, but in the situation could hardly refuse. When they arrived Edward realised that the location was very far from a prosperous part of the city, being mainly dingy unkempt tenements in a street which shared one lamppost, so quite dark, and where the moon provided almost the only illumination. She did not invite him to come inside, and after escorting Yolanda to the entrance door, their parting words were drowned by the screech of an engine whistle and clatter of railway wagons from a marshalling yard which must have been located behind the residential buildings. Edward bade the cabbie to take him to the house in the Grunewald, while he pondered the enigma that was Yolanda.

Saucy Sophia's Snippets



Ich traue mich nicht

(I don't dare)

Another original postcard from our collection.

Trailer for next month.

Chapter XV to be published in July, follows in the footsteps of Annabell and Nigel and their long-distance romance. There are events afoot in Herefordshire and on passage to India, but will it all be good news?

Dorian M. Osborne

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