

Festivals, Carnivals and Celebrations

and

Saucy Sophia's Snippets plus trailer for next month.

OCTOBER, 2023.

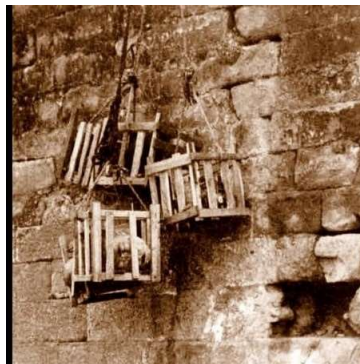
Massive storm clouds had been gathering over the Chinese cities along the coast of the Yellow Sea, and inland especially over the flood plains of the Yellow River, the atmosphere was oppressive which caused the inhabitants of Shanghai to become exceptionally irritable (see note 1). The Deputy Consul of the French Concession looked up from his desk where he had been compiling a list of proposed works to be carried out in the Concession at the rather demanding knock on his office door, and as he looked up he was confronted by a Lieutenant of the XXIV Regiment of Foot who formed the French garrison and who were responsible for law and order. Throwing up a smart salute the young officer confirmed that the prisoner had been transferred from the fortress to a secure room in the Resident Secretary's house. The Deputy Consul merely nodded, thanked the officer, and returned to compiling his list. It was only later that matters developed in a more interesting way.

The previous day, Saturday the 3rd of September, 1887 a serious riot had occurred in the British Concession, but whilst this was the location of origin, it had quickly moved south into the French area where much damage had been inflicted on numerous commercial premises including looting and the murder of one shopkeeper and the raping of five Chinese women. Amongst those arrested by the French military, all but one were Chinese criminals, many members of triad gangs, but the one exception was an Englishman who seemed to be a little bemused, stood straight unlike the Chinese who cringed pathetically. When questioned the Englishman confirmed his name, Edward Ashbourne recently of the P & O ship "Sunda". It seemed to the interrogating officer that this British seaman had merely been caught up in the riot without really realising what was happening and the seriousness of his situation. However, the Consul General had an idea which if successful could enhance his prospects, Louis Baptist de Lowenthal was an ambitious gentleman with his sights set on an ambassadorship appointment to a major Continental great power, preferable Vienna. However, as he had heard that the treaty of mutual support with Russia and the other two (Austria and Prussia) had not been renewed leaving Russia out on a limb, now would be a good time for France to replace Austria and Prussia and thus threaten Germany from east and west and possibly recover Alsace and Lorraine. (see note 2) de Lowenthal saw this as the future for the fatherland and desired to be involved.

Edward had been escorted politely but firmly by plain clothed detectives, so as not to attract attention, to the Resident Secretary's residence on rue Louis Phillippe, where he had a pleasant room to himself on the second floor, equipped with a table, two chairs, a comfortable settee and two armchairs, carpeted floor, and a single bed. That evening the Secretary's Chinese parlour maid brought a tray of dinner, consisting of a boiled rice, sweet and sour pork, and spring rolls, with a selection of seasonable fruit in a separate dish. She also brought to him a few newspapers, two French editions and the English newspaper, the North-China Herald (first published 3rd August, 1850). The room door had been locked, and Edward noticed a uniformed attendant guarding the door which was relocked after she departed. A quick survey of the situation revealed that there was no possibility of escape. The windows were secured, so that whilst they opened in typical continental style opening inwards with shutters to exclude direct sunlight and heat, they had been fastened in such a way as to only open twelve inches, whilst there was a sheer drop of over thirty feet to the ground below and no drainpipes to afford a means of safe descent.

Edward pondered his situation, the “Sunda” had sailed without him, and he had set about exploring Shanghai and on Friday had wandered into what at first, he took to be a dining house, and was extravagantly welcomed. However, he was soon disillusioned, the premises, which extended to the rear quite some distance, were, as he discovered, an extensive combination of refreshment rooms, dining, gambling house, opium den, and brothel. A good place for the unwary to be well and truly fleeced. Whilst Edward was not completely incautious, he was taken unawares by the totally unexpected, and he did not become aware of the full extent of the debauchery within until it was too late.

Entering the refreshment rooms, the front of house appearance of innocence, he ordered a beer and something which looked similar to pancakes. Whatever it was in the drink, and it must have been something which is not usually found in beer, Edward soon began to feel lightheaded, the room strangely drifted away from him, and the next thing he experienced was waking up in a dark filthy stinking alley minus his shoes and jacket containing all his valuable possessions, the most important of which was his total supply of money. Fortunately, the documents which provided his passport remained intact within an oilskin sealed envelope sewn into his trousers, and these had not been removed. He was pulling himself together having raised to a sitting position with his back against a wall, when there was a sudden howling sound emanating from, it seemed, the furthest reaches of the alley. Perceiving more trouble, Edward raised himself and began running as fast as was possible in the condition he was in away from the mob hurtling towards him. The alley way was some considerable length taking him away from Chinese land and towards Concession territory. He reached the end of the alley and glancing left and right chose to turn left, and unbeknown to Edward this led directly to the French Concession, the objective of the rioters, looters, and general hoy polli who composed the mob. Had he turned to his right he would have returned to our Concession area. Leaving Chinese Shanghai with its constant reminders of the justice delivered by the Celestial Empire to their criminals, the condemned confined upright in a close wooden cage and left to die in a public space, or the heads of the executed displayed in open cages hanging from lampposts, it must have seemed to Edward he had merely leapt out of the frying pan into the fire. To avoid attracting unwelcome attention and realising that the mob had another objective in mind, other than his destruction, Edward allowed the gang to pass by, so that he was in their rear, with the intention of dropping out and trying to find his way back to his lodgings, not an easy matter as by now darkness had fallen. The mob surged forward in a frenzy of destruction smashing the windows of shops and houses, helping themselves to any portable contents and generally causing as much damage as possible. By now Edward had successfully detached himself from the vandals, or so he thought when ahead he spotted in a double line French foot soldiers deployed across the street their rifles raised, a few moments later the platoon sergeant gave the order to open fire and the mob fled, except for a few dead and seriously writhing wounded who lay in the dirt. Our hero who had dropped to the ground wondering how he could best make his escape from this disastrous situation now noticed a large group of Chinese soldiers blocking the only possible escape route, and advancing they soon spotted the Englishmen and hauled him to his feet. However, their commanding officer had no intention of allowing himself to become embroiled in an international incident and quickly passed Mr. Ashbourne to the custody of the French lieutenant commanding the French troops.



Display of the beheaded heads of criminals, Shanghai, Celestial Empire.



The condemned Chinese prisoner, caged torcher.

Thus, it was that young Edward had firstly been taken to the French garrison headquarters and thence to the Resident Secretary's house. Sunday passed uneventfully, and on Monday morning, the 5th September the maid brought breakfast to him, cafe and croissants, and that morning's edition of the Shanghai News which briefly reported a riot in the French Concession and that order had been speedily restored by French troops. No further details were included.

At exactly ten-thirty-five a sergeant of foot hammered on the door of the room Edward was temporarily occupying and unlocking the door demanded that M. Ashbourne put his hands behind his back whereupon Edward was handcuffed and led down flights of stairs to an interrogation room in the basement. To meet him was a smartly dressed gentleman with a bright red ribbon in his frock coat buttonhole; the Englishman judged the French gentleman's age to be somewhere between forty and forty-five years, though actually he had just celebrated his fifty-second birthday. The basement room was not large, having a table and four wooden chairs, otherwise quite bare with timber floorboards. As Edward entered the sergeant barked at him "Assa vous," and understanding some French the prisoner promptly seated himself opposite the interrogator who required the soldier to remove the handcuffs.

Addressing Edward in perfect English the Frenchman commenced by informing his enforced guest that by his unfortunate behaviour he had placed himself in grave danger. There are many Chinese who would dearly love to execute you as an example to the foreign devils, the British supported by the Prussians would prefer to make an international incident of the matter to weaken our great power status. So far we have managed to keep the matter out of the press, but I cannot hold you here for long, tongues will wag. You could be sent to Tianjin, but that will only transfer the problem elsewhere. We must decide what to do with you and studying the wall to Edward's left as though deep in thought, he mused that his prisoner could be delivered to one of the triad gangs who would make short work of him.

Having thoroughly alarmed Edward, in a softer voice and looking directly at the very concerned Englishman the Consul General, for it was he conducting the interview, no less than Louis Baptist de Lowenthan himself, who leaned forward and after dismissing the sergeant said in a confidential manner. "I could have a proposition to put to you, how would you like to return to your home continent."

The surprise showed on Edward's face as he enquired what would be expected of him, and where on the continent he would be taken to.

"Not so fast" responded de Lowenthan, "If you agree you will be taken to Marseille by private yacht, a very comfortable passage, from there you will receive your instructions. The one thing I can promise you is that you will not be asked to undertake any action detrimental to your home country, your Queen, or her government."

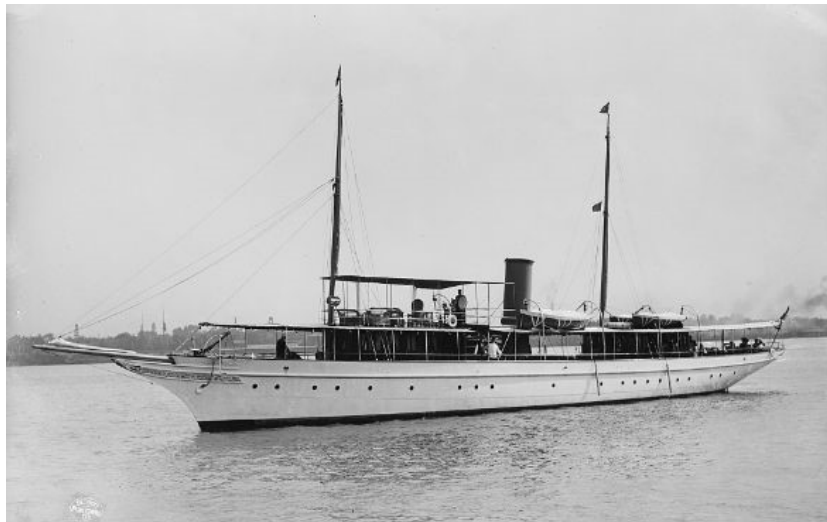
It seemed to Edward that he had little choice, and he desired to return home, and a free

comfortable passage would be just the ticket. However, as an afterthought he sought clarification that the “instructions” would not involve committing a crime or crimes, and receiving an assurance that nothing of this nature was contemplated he agreed, there did not seem to be any other option.

Having achieved the first part of his objective de Lowenthan next had the Englishman returned to his room where Edward spent the remainder of the day.

At precisely 0725 hours on Tuesday morning a florists delivery van (horse drawn) drew up alongside the entrance to Resident Secretary’s garden, a stout door set in the high brick wall, and from the vehicle a rather unassuming man descended and passed into the garden, the door having been opened as prearranged by a man dressed as a footman. The visitor entered the house via the tradesman’s entrance and was met by the Consul General who immediately conducted him to the Resident Secretary’s spacious study, where they were soon joined by M. Francois Colbere, whose study they were occupying. De Lowenthan effected the introductions, the newcomer being M. Emile Dubois, an extremely wealthy man of international business, and Louis Baptist outlined his plan to use the Englishman to obtain information which he believed would be of value to them all at the Oktoberfest in München (Munich) starting on the 12th October. As a favoured Englishman he would be ideally placed to collect important gossip concerning German intentions following the collapse of the Three Emperor’s Understanding and which Great Power would the Czar of All the Russias favour. It was fortunate for the conspirator’s especially the Consul General that the situation presented an opportunity for career advancement. He also explained to the company how Edward Ashbourne is a potential political embarrassment to France, they could not continue to hold him without good reason, if they turned him over to the officials of the Emperess of the Celestial Empire without doubt he would be decapitated as a show of strength against the hated foreigners, whilst the British would be embarrassed not wishing to provoke local trouble, also they, mainly meaning himself though he did not say so, would miss out on the aforementioned opportunity to gain official recognition. The Consul General then explained that M. Dubois would be sailing for Marseille tomorrow and had agreed to transport M. Ashbourne there. On landing in France, he would be handed over to a Foreign Ministry official for briefing in good time for travelling to München. Edward was then brought to the study and informed of the arrangements.

At first light the following morning as the tide was beginning to ebb the private yacht “la Salacia” (see note 3) slipped her moorings and with just enough head of steam to maintain steerage way with her single propeller silently departed Shanghai downstream along the Yangtze River to the open waters of the East China Sea. In the early hours of the morning, in fact shortly after one o’clock Edward Ashbourne had been escorted on foot from the Resident Secretary’s house in the French Concession to the river where the “la Salacia” was moored and put aboard in a small cabin.



The steam yacht “Salacia”.

The passage to Marseille was fast and uneventful. With a crew of fifteen deck hands plus two stokers, cabin and galley staff the two masted steam yacht lacked for nothing. Sailing south they put into Hue on the Perfumed River, the royal capital of Annam, a French Protectorate which had just been incorporated into the newly formed French Indochina, for fresh provisions. By passing the British possession of Singapore the “la Salacia” passed through the Malacca Straights to cross the Bay of Bengal for the French possession of Pondichery on the Coromandel coast where the ship’s bunkers were refuelled with coal, and the kitchen galley stores resupplied. Whilst Edward was allowed on deck when out at sea, and dined with M. Dubois and the officers, when in port he was kept concealed below decks. The voyage itself was relatively uneventful, they passed through the Suez Canal, and berthed at Marseille having sailed past the fortress of the Ile du Chateau d’If in the bay, the fortress prison made famous by Alexandre Dumas in his novel “The Count of Monty Christo”.



As the “la Salacia” was secured to the quay two officials from the Foreign Ministry came aboard and politely but firmly escorted Edward to the Gare of the Paris, Lyon et Mediterranean Railway, the “PLM” and on arrival at the Gare de Lyon in Paris was taken in a closed carriage to a house in the district of Neuilly sur Seine, conveniently close to the centre of Paris, but far enough away to be discrete, private and secret.



The “PLM” Railway Station in Marseille from where Edward travelled to Paris.

Here he was interrogated to establish that he could be used as an asset, and not a liability. He was then, after a few days, briefed as to their requirements. He would be landed at the Hoek van Holland in the Dutch Netherlands from a vessel flying a red ensign, provided with railway tickets to travel to Muchen and a good supply of Guilders and Marks. Most importantly Edward was provided with a story to establish his bona fides as a wealthy English gentleman involved in the procurement and export of military supplies and railway construction of whatsoever the purchaser required. Whilst enjoying himself at the Oktoberfest his principle purpose is to discover what the diplomatic intentions of the Great Powers are likely to be following the non-renewal of the Alliance of the Three Emperors earlier that year, and would Russia and/or Italy be receptive to an understanding with France. Having established himself in München he was then required to travel to the fashionable spa town of Karlsbad in Bohemia, part of the empire of the Dual Monarchy of Austria and Hungary (see note 4). To enable Edward to maintain the reputation he was to

establish, documentary credit facilities would be arranged with the Berenberg Bank in München and with the Bank für Oberösterreich und Salzburg in Karlsbad, whilst the Englishman was handed letters of introduction and accreditation.

After fifteen days of intensive instruction Edward was taken to the Gare du Nord and boarded a train for Boulogne sur Mer, where he was provided with temporary accommodation at the Chateau de Boulogne sur Mer until the vessel arrived in the port to take him to the Hoek van Holland.

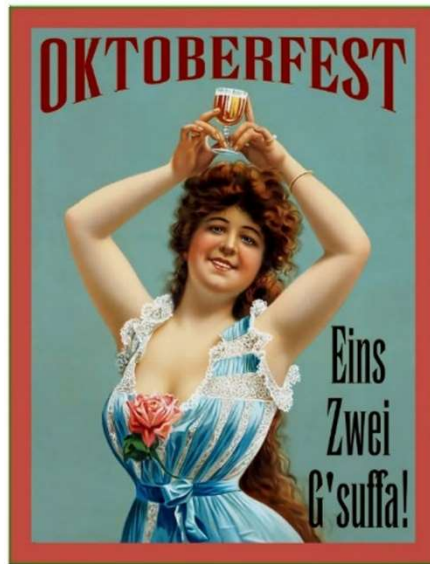


Chateau de Boulogne sur Mer

The railway journey to the capital of the Kingdom of Bayern (Bavaria) was quite uneventful though Edward found it rather tedious, with changes of trains on the Dutch/German frontier, and again after Frankfurt am Main, at Aschaffenburg from the Prussian State Railway to the Royal Bavarian State Railways via Nuremberg to München, the royal capital city, arriving there on the 11th of October. He lodged at a Gasthaus (Guesthouse) on Marienplatz in central München, with windows that overlooked the square. To the outside world Mr. Edward Ashbourne had travelled to the capital of Bayern with his Scottish manservant or valet, and this is certainly how the situation appeared, Edward calling the man Muray or Jock, and sometimes Hamish, they maintained this charade the whole time: However, the reality was rather different. M. Edouard Duhem was a Foreign Ministry employee who was fluent in English with a Scottish accent, who had been entrusted to ensure that the young Englishman followed instructions, whilst being steered and supervised to avoid blunders and achieve results for the French Republic.



Edward, accompanied by his valet at all times, attended the celebration of Oktoberfest whilst mingling with the gentlemen, selected by M, Duhem, who were best connected to know the temperature of the international diplomatic water. Under the guidance of the Frenchman Edward was learning fast, how to conduct himself in the exalted company he found himself introduced to, although chiefly their ministerial aids. Amongst others in München he was introduced to the Bayern Foreign Minister, Friedrich Krafft Graf von Crailsheim, and also the Minister President of the Kingdom of Saxony, Georg Friedrich Alfred Graf von Fabrice, but he was able to engage in meaningful conversation with the great men's aids de camp.



On the final day there was a horse race, and Edward who placed a bet on “Prince Otto.” at the behest of M. Duhem as it would demonstrate empathy with the event, won 500 marks when the horse romped in at twenty to one.



Dr. Graf von Grailheim.
früherer bayerischer Ministerpräsident

That evening the Frenchman announced that on the morrow, much to Edward’s surprise, they would be traveling by railway to Karlsbad in the Austrian lands of Bohemia. He also briefed his nominal superior on the reason and expectations at the famous spa town, the principal location on the Continent where the rich, famous, and noble travelled to for both a cure and the social activity.

Arriving in Karlsbad Edward was to learn that there are 13 main hot springs and 300 smaller which provide the therapeutic health-giving warm water for which the spa town is not only famous, but also the most popular, enjoying some 26,000 guests every year. It is situated at the confluence of the Egar and Tepla rivers, tributaries of the Elbe, that mighty river which flows northwards to the North Sea at Cuxhaven after flowing past Dresden, the Saxon Switzerland, Meissen and Magdeburg.

As in München one of the principal topics of conversation was the mysterious death the year before on the 13th June of the Swan King, King Ludwig II of Bayern on Lake Starnberg. There was much speculation as to the cause, and over a year later the circumstances remained a mystery.



Sadova Colonnade, Karlsbad.

As was expected, the spa town was crowded with just the people the French Republican Government desired Edward to befriend in the hope he would be able to discover the intentions of the Great Powers of Central Europe by detecting comments and casual remarks which could be extremely meaningful. He met a great many gentlemen senior in their government's service and their wives or mistresses including Rudolf, Crown Prince of Austria who had brought his then mistress, the Prince of Wales with Princess Alexandra, Prince Otto von Bismark and Count Gustav Kolnoky de Korospatak of Austria to mention just a few. Edward was able to report a variety of information, some of which he thought might be useful, but most he suspected the French would already be aware of, such as the expected demise of the German Kaiser, Wilhelm I, and speculation regarding the health of the Crown Prince Ferdinand who was, it had been reported, gravely ill. He reported having met Ferdinand Adolf Heinrich August Graf von Zeppelin who talked with great enthusiasm about powered flight in ships lighter than air capable of carrying men and cargo over immense distances but always under the captain's control unlike balloons where there was no control of direction. There was speculation regarding the future of the Balkans as the Ottoman government in Constantinople increasingly resorted to severe repression to maintain authority. There was also much concern regarding Russia's relentless eastern expansion, especially the annexation of Turkestan, and moves towards the northern approaches to the North West Frontier, much to the alarm of the Viceroy the Earl of Dufferin. Whilst the Austrians and Prussians Edward met all adopted a nonchalant attitude towards the non-renewal by St. Petersburg of the Three Emperor's Treaty, Edward suspected that there was an element of uneasiness. Whilst Russia expanded eastwards all would be well, but what if their foreign policy turned towards Central Europe, there would be fear of the Russian "Steamroller" descending on Austrian and Prussian lands, not a satisfactory prospect.



The Dirndl Dress, a married lady.

Just as at the Oktoberfest, being a well healed young bachelor, Edward found himself surrounded by a bevy of playful and flirtatious pretty young ladies, and he was much taken with the dirndl dresses most of them wore. Whilst there was an infinite variety of design

and style, they all conformed to a basic pattern, resembling the dresses worn during the last century, with a laced bodice over a white or light-coloured blouse. These dresses were mostly worn with a sash or apron tied on the ladies left side when single or unattached, and on the right side when married, spoken for or just disinterested. Being conscious of the mission for which he was being paid, Edward concentrated on the young ladies fathers, which flattered their father as they thought he was attempting to win favour, although he engaged them in conversation to broaden his knowledge of their countries affairs.

He met Georg Ritter von Schonerer who expressed his opinion that his native Austria should combine with the new German Empire, in short, he was attempting to establish a Pan German Party. Whilst at Karls Bad von Schonerer introduced him to Dr. Karl Lueger who was a member of the Vienna City Council.



Georg Ritter von Schonerer.

In conversation with almost all the continentals he met, Edward detected a wariness with regard to his country and especially the Empire and Royal Navy. They seemed to be envious of British power and strength with a mixture of fear and jealousy, whilst at the same time only Austria was particularly interested in possessing a navy, Prussia, Bayern, Saxony, Baden Baden, Württemberg, and others were mainly land locked and thus the defence of land frontiers by armies was the most relevant.

There was another matter which only Edward seemed to notice, in the lands of the Ottoman Empire, south of the River Danube, in an area known as Servia or Serbia there seemed to be a strange semi secret society to which most of the inhabitants belonged, and the main focus appeared to be the retelling of past glories and of betrayal which brought about their subjugation at the hands of the hated Ottomans. Would this bring trouble in the future or was it just a figment of Edward's imagination.

In due course M. Dubois announced that it is time to depart and passed to Edward a hansom payment for his services to the French Foreign Ministry. Edward was delighted and wondered what to do next. Now that he was on his own, he wrote to his parents in Western-under-Penyard to enquire after their health and the business, providing at the same time an address to which they could reply.

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While all the above was going on, Lady Alexandra in Memel at last received a letter from Edward's parents in Western-under-Penyard which informs her that they last received a letter from him from Shanghai and that when he wrote he was expecting to return home within the month, that was dated Thursday the 1st of September, 1887.

Author's Acknowledgements:

Reference to the Ashbourne family, M. Francois Colbere, Louis Baptist de Lowenthan, Graf Karl von Czernowitz, M. Emile Dubois, are entirely fictional as also is the Hotel Imperial.

I cannot physically take you, my dear reader, to the year 1887, but I can try to take you emotionally and physiologically into the period of the late Nineteenth Century, a world so very different from today. A world where there was far greater social mobility than now, with the possibility of immense wealth or real poverty. The colonies also provided opportunity but also grave danger.

Notes:

1. On the 28th September, 1887 the Yellow River caused flooding over 50,000 square miles of surrounding land and the deaths of an estimated 930,000 to two million Chinese.
2. Arising from the ashes of the Great Disturber's attempt to pre-empt the Fuhrer's ambition to control Europe, the 1815 Treaty of Vienna also led to the establishment of a Holy Alliance, later referred to as the league of the three Emperors. It was this league of the Czar of Russia Alexander III, the Kaiser of Austria, the King of Hungary Franz Josef, and the German Kaiser Wilhelm which ceased to exist in 1887. In many ways this was the precursor to the Great War of 1914-8, as France, Russia, Serbia and ourselves formed a defensive/aggressive ring around the Central
3. Salacia, the ancient Greek Olympian goddess of sea water, wife of Poseidon (Roman Neptune). The yacht was so named to bring good fortune.
4. Since the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1919 the name of Karlsbad has been changed to Karlovy Vary, being now in the Czech Republic.

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Saucy Sophia's Snippets



An embossed postcard from the Author's private collection posted in Portugal on 5th November, 1905.

Trailer for next month.

Edward continues his travels in Continental Europe and participates in the ancient festival of Martinmas or Old Halloween celebrated on St. Martin's Day.

Dorian Osborne

1st October, 2023.