

THE ASHBOURNE FAMILY SAGA

CHAPTER XXII

and

Saucy Sophia's Snippets plus trailer for next month,

March, 2025.

Sitting in a railway carriage of the "Great Western Railway" returning home after the fiasco at the "Jolly Tar" in Gloucester George had roared with laughter, much to the consternation of his fellow passengers. Now, at breakfast the following morning he had had time for reflection. There were a few matters worth considering, but most important, why had he allowed the strumpet to take advantage of him in the way she had? True she was pretty, persuasive and seemed intelligent. She had the ability to let him think that he mattered to her when in reality she had been part of a scheme to blackmail him. He had not yet worked out what for but thought it must be money. He would have appeared to be well healed, so good for quite a few guineas. George also realised that Emma's behaviour towards him, her pointed refusal to accept any matrimonial harmony, rendered him vulnerable to female advances. He had two sons, other family and the business to consider. He must be very careful and circumspect. It was the first day of February.

The tragedy at Mayerling on the 30th January, 1889 was widely reported in the newspapers of Great Britain and especially those on the Continent. George read a report in the "Morning Post" while he drank a cup of tea before rising from the table. Although not know at the time, the lovers suicide pact between Crown Prince Rudolph of Austria and Baroness Maria von Vetsera was deliberately suppressed by the Imperial Court in Vienna. Christian practice forbade self-destruction and did not therefore allow Christian burial. The Crown Prince, only son of Kaiser Franz Josef and Kaiserin Elizabeth, had purchased the hunting lodge at Mayerling in the Vien Wald (Vienna Woods) some years earlier.

George did not take too much notice, for the majority of Englishmen there was quite enough to read and discuss regarding the murderous activities of the Irish, and most would remember the outrage which occurred on the 6th May, 1882, now seven years ago when in the late afternoon in Phoenix Park in Dublin Fenian murdering extremists viciously attacked Lord Frederick Cavendish, second son of the 7th Duke of Devonshire, who was Chief Secretary for Ireland and Mr. Thomas Henry Burke, Permanent Undersecretary killing them both.

As though to add insult to injury in 1886 the Liberal Government of William Gladstone, in which Lord Frederick Cavendish had served, introduced the Government of Ireland Bill, commonly referred to as the Irish Home Rule Bill. Many considered the Bill to be a reward for murder and general lawlessness. There had been general relief when on the 8th June, the Bill failed to gain a majority in the House by 30 votes. 311 aye and 341 no,

Earlier on the 26th February 1881 the Boer War (first) had laid bare our imperial weakness when a force comprising the 92nd Regiment of Foot, the Gordon Highlanders, the 58th Regiment of Foot, the Rutlandshire and a Natal Brigade were roundly defeated at the Battle of Majuba Hill after numerous other lesser losses.

It would not be long before a certain Miss Matilda Alice Powles, better known as Vesta Tilley, raised the roof in music halls with her rendering of “Bring back the flag from Majuba” to great patriotic acclaim. Last year in 1888 St. Stephen’s Review had published a map of the British Isles depicting the Marquis of Salisbury as St. George slaying the Dragon, William Gladstone.



A Modern St. George and the Dragon.

George put down the newspaper he had not even been reading, promptly ceasing his musings, a waste of time he did not usually permit himself to indulge in, and rising to his feet he collected his hat and cane from the hall stand and made his way to the local railway station. At home his wife Emma remained languishing in bed, as had become normal for she rarely rose before mid-day, and sometimes not until the early evening, except when there was a church service to attend. Their two sons Alfred and Charles now three and two years of age respectively needed their mother but had to make do with Grandmother Emily and Aunt Annabel. It was not a completely satisfactory arrangement but in the circumstances the best that could be achieved, while they all hoped for Emma’s recovery.



The Gloucester Constabulary, 1880's

George marched into the main police station in Gloucester and asked to see the chief constable for the county. The desk sergeant looked up and enquired if you have an appointment, sir. There was a note of deference in his voice. George had dressed in a smart morning suit with a black silk top hat and carried a black silver topped Malacca cane. The family firm had become quite prosperous, and George desired to be respected.

“No, I was not aware that I needed one.”

“Oh yes sir, the Chief don’t see no one whats not got an appointment, sir.”

“And how, may I enquire, does one arrange an appointment.” George was somewhat put out at this possible delay.

“If sir would like to explain the nature of his business I will see what can be done.”

“My good man, that’s for me to lay before the chief constable, and why I ask to see him, do I make myself clear!”

“Ai’nt like that, Sir. You need an appointment first.”

By now George was losing his patience with the policeman and snapped. “If it’s so difficult to see the Chief, then I suppose his assistant will have to do, I’ll see him now, if it’s not too much trouble!” George had little time for public servants who he considered an avoidable expense on the public purse.

Drawing himself up to his full height George said in what he hoped was a voice commanding the utmost respect and obedience. “Now look here my...” He progressed no further as the sergeant interrupted with. “Ai’nt like that see. Rules is rules. We gotta ‘ave rules else where would we be wiv ou ‘em. It’s like this mister, 48 B, sub clause 4 clearly states tha’ members o’ the public whats wants to see officers of the police on any ma’er must first ‘ave an appoin’ment, an’ that’s the Chief, see . . . sir.” The ‘sir’ added as an afterthought.

George was about to explode telling the blockhead where he could keep his ‘rules’ when there was a sudden commotion at the entrance and in came two burley constables with a very bedraggled woman between them. One glance at the tableau was enough, the gentleman at the desk took in a woman of the street, a common whore arrested by the constables, no doubt for soliciting for immoral purposes, as well as being drunk and disorderly. The woman, who in the more confined space of the police station entrance hall stank something awful, her cloths, which had once been of fine fabric looked to have been purchased from the local rag and bone man, which they had, only added to the object of abject depravity before them. Shaking herself free of the two officers she lurched across to the desk, and leaning on it for support uttered in an alcoholically slurred voice.



Ada.

“ ‘allo deary, fancy a good time do yer.” Then looking at the Sergeant with bleary eyes she said. “Don’t I knows you, yer booked me last week or was it the week afore, me minds gone, I can’t remember nutin.”

The sergeant entered brief details in the register and looking up at the two constables said. “Take her away and lock her up, cell number three is free, we’ll decide what to do with her when she’s sober.”

Before the officers could lay hands on the whore she turned and addressing the sergeant said somewhat incoherently. “I dos know you. What you put down in that ‘ear book o’ yours. Me name’s Ada, you got that? Ada Tits they call me, not that there’s much left now. That’s wha’ I’s always been called, though sometimes, when they think I’s not lis’ning f---ing Ada. See I’s known in all the best places I is. Did I ever tell you ‘bout Mad Mick McNab what ‘angs ‘bout wiv that villain Bill the Knife. Done me over they did. Said I was fouling their patch. Right trouble those two are. You should arrest ‘em, clean up the town that would, not lock me up. I ai’nt done nut’in, just a li’ll o’ what me fancies. ‘Ai’nt done nu’in wrong. So wha’ me being locked up for?”

The sergeant was just about to say he had heard enough and order the two constables to take the old tart way, when the outer doors opened and the two policemen drew themselves to attention and smartly saluted the newcomer, together with the sergeant.

“Carry on chaps.” Said the impeccably dress new arrival. He was dressed in a black military style frock coat complete with frogging and carrying a silk black top hat.

To the sergeant “Mr. Cowslow, keep that woman safe, I shall wish to interview her later.”

“Yes sir,” And in a quiet voice. “This gentleman has been asking to see you, sir, would you like me to send him away?”

Turning to George and seeing him seemingly for the first time, the Assistant Chief Constable exclaimed. “Georgy old boy, what a surprise seeing you here, what brings you to our noble establishment?”

George already thought he recognised the gentleman but was not certain. Now with any lingering doubts removed he took the proffered hand and with equal enthusiasm said. “Algie, how good to see you again, must be over ten years since we departed Monmouth. I obviously have no need to ask what you have been doing!”

The desk sergeant’s mouth dropped open in astonishment his eyes equally wide open.

In answer to his old friend's enquiry George asked if there is somewhere they could talk in private.

"Certainly, old boy. Come on up to my office, and to the sergeant, can you organise tea for both of us. Then to George. "That is unless you prefer coffee or something stronger." George, relieved by his sudden change of fortune merely stammered that tea would be fine.

In Algenon's comfortable office on the first floor, the two engage in friendly conversation, the nature of which would never have arisen when at school. The Assistant Chief Constable did not chide George for "being in trade" but showed genuine interest in the business. Algie for his part admitted that his Pata had sent him to a 'crammer' after leaving Monmouth School with the intention of passing the "ICS" examination, the Indian Civil Service where he could become a colonial administrator, and possibly rise to a local Resident, or senior secretary at Government House. However, no sooner had he gained a certificate of competency and about to apply to the India Office than his Pata collapsed with an incurable malady. Algie was needed at home to administer the family affairs but a post in the police beckoned, thus you find me here, the Assistant Chief Constable concluded.

George enquired if Algie remembered their times in the school chapel and the extensive sermons delivered by the Headmaster Mr. Roberts. They both laughed in memory of one of the boys who had deliberately dropped marbles during one rather long sermon, while Algie supplied the headmaster's full name, Charles Manley Roberts, adding that he will probably be retiring soon or dying, he's been Head since 1859.



The Chapel of Monmouth School.

“Georgie, old boy, he didn’t just drop marbles, he arranged for them to roll over the steps from the altar area and down the aisle, don’t know how he did it, but using cotton thread from his seat near the front.”

“Did he get caught?”

“Why, yes. I forget that you were not there when the lad was named, seems that old Roberts found out and gave Sandy McSweeney six of the best at assembly. No one else tried the trick though.”

Then the Assistant Chief Constable turned to George and enquired the nature of the matter he wished to discuss.

George Ashbourne who had been wondering how much of the story to disclose to the police, now, with an old school chum, felt confident enough to relate the whole history. “That old tart who was taken to the cells, she could be part of what I am about to tell.”

“How so?”

“There is an old brewery in Drybrook that’s being offered for sale, the ‘Bonnie Moira’ I saw it advertised, and I plan to expand the family business by buying it. Seems there are others with the same idea. No great surprise there you would say but I have reason to believe that they are very far from honest. The present owner accidentally mentioned to me, I am certain he did not mean to say anything, that they offered him cash, but were so intimidating that he did not believe he would receive anything. I think I know where they operate from too, the ‘Jolly Tar’ by the docks.”



The Docks, Gloucester.

“Did you catch any names of the gang, for I think it is a notorious gang that seem to control the ‘Jolly Tar’.

“I did hear, or I think I heard, one of them called Mick McNab.”

“Could that have been Mad Mick McNab?”



Mad Mick McNab,

“Yes, I believe you’re right, and there was another, Bill the Knife, I think, yes that’s right.”

“Is there anymore?” asked the police officer.

“Yes.” Declared George, who then went on to relate the events at the ‘Jolly Tar’ when he had wandered in in search of something to eat, been plied with strong drink and offered far more than one would decently expect.

“You may be just the man we need. We have been looking for evidence to charge the Black Spot Gang for months, but every time we find a witness they withdraw, too frightened and intimidated to take the stand in court.”

“How can I help?” Said George who was now thinking that when his purchase completed he could be left with quite a problem with the gang who now seemed to be far more of a threat than he had first imagined.

“Listen old chap, we need evidence to collar the whole gang, and so far we know of six of them Mad Mick McNab is the leader, Bill the Knife his second. Then there is Jo O’Silver, Pat McGrab, Paddy O’Hara and Dick ‘Danger’ Swiveller.”

“There is a seventh, the photographer Harry Flash.”

“Good, we thought there are more.” And after a pause he looked up saying. “I have an idea, but it may be dangerous. Would you be prepared for us to have a notice placed in the ‘Gloucester Citizen’ announcing your agreed purchase of the brewery? Something such as ‘we are given to understand by an anonymous source that a certain gentleman who hails from Weston-under-Penyard and who is otherwise engaged in the manufacture of carriages is about to purchase the old brewery at Drybrook for an undisclosed sum.’ It would be written by a journalist of course to give authenticity to the story. What do you think? Have to obtain the Chief’s agreement first though.”

“I am not too sure about the Weston-under-Penyard bit, though how will a press statement help?”

“Sorry, old boy, I am letting my thoughts run ahead too much. We set a trap for the gang and hope that they fall for it. You will need protection as you would be the bait. Haven’t quite worked it all out yet, but you get the general idea.”

And there the matter rested, awaiting the addition of the fine details and the approval of the chief, plus examination of the old whore in the cells, Ada, for more information about the gang.

The interview seemed to be over when Angie asked George what he made of the notice in the morning papers about the Austrian Crown Prince. George, who had not thought much but deemed it wiser not to say so merely said he had been too busy with other matters.



Crown Princess Stephanie.

“Dreadful business.” Said Angie. “It’s the ladies I am sorry for, must be a dreadful disaster.” When George looked a little mystified he added. “The Queen Empress, Elizabeth and the Crown Princess, Stephanie. Seems intruders broke into a hunting lodge at Mayerling in the Vienna Woods at night and murdered the only son of the Kaiser Franz Josef and the beautiful Sisi as Elizabeth is known. Dangerous being at the top though, always someone wishing to kill you, a what.”

Within a few days George Ashbourne received written confirmation that his offer of purchase, at below pre-sale estimate had been accepted, and now, but for the legal formalities, the brewery would be his.

Meanwhile, whilst the air was blue in the “Jolly Tar” with the frustration of their plans the Black Spot Gang to secure possession of the old brewery in Drybrook; in Germany the day after the announcement of the demise of the Crown Prince there was much activity. In Danzig Edward received a summons to report to Imperial Naval Head Quarters in Berlin without delay. Since the meeting at the Kaiserhof Hotel where he had proposed marriage to Alexandra and her enthusiastic acceptance his future German relatives has been busy planning the wedding. The discussions did not take place behind Edward’s back as they desired that he be involved at every step of the way, chiefly because they realised he would

not be familiar with their customs which differed a little from those of the Church of England. Now he was to travel to Berlin, and Alexandra guessed it would be something to do with the tragedy at Mayerling.

When Edward arrived at Naval Head Quarters he was informed that he should report immediately to Kommodore (Commodore) von Glinka. The young Lieutenant saluted smartly clicking his heels, a technique he had finally mastered after months of practice. The Kommodore motioned Edward to a chair saying that he apologised in advance, but unfortunately he had little time to spare as he would have preferred longer. He then informed Edward that the Admiralty are very pleased with his work at Danzig, but for the moment his services are required elsewhere. Edward said nothing.

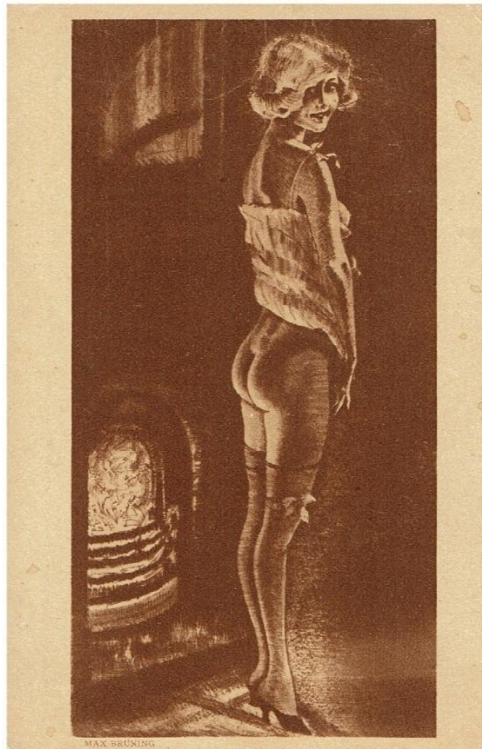
Kommodore von Glinka then said he was sure the Lieutenant is aware of the unfortunate death of the Austrian Crown Prince. "There will be a lying in state followed by a state funeral in Vienna, and that as her most loyal Allie we must be represented. There is a little difficulty though. Austria is a Roman Catholic country, and our officers are mostly of the Lutheran faith and reluctant to participate in catholic church services." Edward waited for the senior officer to continue.

"A delegation to support His Majesty has been gathered together from the army, navy and diplomatic corps. Unfortunately, the officer who was to have accompanied myself has been taken rather seriously ill and will not be able to travel to Vienna. In the circumstances I would like you to take his place, it will mean you being absent from Danzig, but I am sure they will manage without you for some time. Before Edward had a chance to respond the Kommodore hurried on. "The Admiralty have agreed to your promotion to the rank of administrative Captain, which you deserve for the excellent management of our dockyard at Danzig, but you may be away for, let us say, two weeks in total. It is a great honour for you, and you will be kept continuously on your feet."

"I am greatly honoured, and thank you sir, may I enquire when I am to leave for Vienna, or do we travel together?"

And so, a day or two later, a party consisting of naval and army officers of various ranks departed from the Anhalter Bahnhof travelling to Vienna to attend the state funeral of Crown Prince Rudolf.

Saucy Sophia's Snippets



Girl at the fireside by Max Bruning (1887 – 1968)

It is cold outside in Central Europe with snow on the ground, she is warming herself by the fire, having disrobed of her afternoon clothes before dressing for the evening.

An etching from the 1920's.

Trailer for April.

A trap is laid for the Black Spot Gang, but before it is sprung there is a gruesome discovery.

Dorian M. Osborne

1st March, 2025.