

THE ASHBOURNE FAMILY SAGA

CHAPTER XI

and

Saucy Sophia's Snippets plus trailer for next month.

March, 2024.

It was on the morning of the first day of February in the year of Our Lord One Thousand, Eight Hundred and Eighty Eight when Annabell tripped down to the breakfast room in the Ashbourne family home in Western-under-Penyard to find a letter waiting for her that had been delivered earlier, but this letter was special or so the embossed crest on the back of the envelope proclaimed. Opening the envelope, she withdrew an invitation to a Ball at the Chase, the house in Gloucester Road which she had passed many times, or rather the grounds of the house behind high stone walls, the property of General Sir James and Lady Lucy Fitzmayor who had been resident at the Chase for about eight years.

Annabell's initial reaction was of joy, there would be many young gentlemen at the Ball, she would wear a fine dress, and just possibly be the belle of the ball, then reaction set in, would she be shunned as other guests would consider her family were only "trade" she did not have a dress suitable for a grand occasion, and she would need a carriage not just a gig or trap. She sat pondering the situation slowly eating toast and marmalade when her father William looked in for cup of tea before setting out for Goodrich Court to deliver a landau they had repaired.

"What's up girl" he said, "You look as though you've lost a pound and found a penny."

Annabell showed him the invitation.

"That's grand my girl, an invitation to a Ball at the General's house, what could be better, may even set you up for life!"

"I'm not so sure."

"What do you mean?"

He was spared listening any further as his wife Emily entered the room and William beat a hasty retreat stating that he could not linger as he had a carriage to deliver to Goodrich Court and could not be late.



Example of a landau delivered to Goodrich Court.

Annabell was seated at the breakfast table holding the invitation, which was instantly spotted by her mother, together with her daughter's agitated expression.

"Whatever is the matter dear, is that a letter or invitation you're holding." As she crossed the room to stand over Annabell.

"It is Mother, to a Ball, I am invited by General Sir James and Lady Lucy to the Chase on the 14th, that allows me only two weeks to prepare and I've nothing suitable to wear. I can't refuse, I'll need a carriage, and I suppose I should be chaperoned, or it won't be right, and I shall be questioned or worse!"

Emily thought for a moment, Annabell is now twenty-three years of age, and in very real danger of being 'left on the shelf', a daunting prospect for any young lady as the situation led to her being cast upon the charity of her male relatives to the annoyance of their wives. To Annabell she said, taking charge of the situation. "There is no question to answer, you must go to the Ball, I will speak with your father when he returns. I am sure something can be done."

After a few moments during which Emily gathered together her breakfast from the sideboard, she turned to her daughter saying, "It's no good, my dear, moping about the house, it won't bring Clive back, you need to get out and meet another nice gentleman."

At the mention of Clive, the fiancée who had been killed in the terrible eruption at Rotorua in New Zealand almost two years ago, the young lady burst into tears and rose to leave the room. She was stopped from doing so by her mother's quick intervention, and finding her exit barred she flung herself into a chair and sobbed pitifully.

Emily, taking pity on her daughter, put an arm around her shoulders and in a conciliatory voice tried to sooth Annabell's misery. "It's no good dear, he was a fine gentleman and would have made a splendid husband, but we cannot undo what has befallen him and many others. We must continue to pray for his immortal soul as we do every Sunday and in our prayers each night, but you remain with us, and I'm sure you do not wish to become an old maid."

Annabell looked up, and drying her eyes said, in a subdued voice, "Yes Mother, you are quite right, and I should not let my own grief spoil matters for everyone else. Clive would not wish me to remain constantly miserable – would he?"

When William returned from delivering the landau to Mr. Moffatt, at Goodrich Court he was in an exceptionally good mood, the MP had been well pleased with the repairs, said the carriage had never looked so good, and that Mrs. Moffatt would be delighted, and he added five pounds to the payment as a mark of his esteem. He wasted no time in telling Emily the good news.



Goodrich Court

Emily poured a glass of small beer for her husband and declared it was very good news, and with such praise there would be scope for expansion of the business, to which Annabell added her own voice of joy at her father's success. William looked a little surprised and Emily, fearing her daughter would say too much reminded her of an errand she had agreed to perform. After Annabell had departed Emily turned to her husband saying. "Husband, dear, there is something I must talk to you about, Annabell has received an invitation to a Ball from General Fitzmayor."

At this point a dark shadow passed across William's face and realising her mistake Emily quickly added "Not from the General to a ball, you old silly, the invitation is to attend a Ball *at the Chase*."

"So, what's all the fuss about, there's nothing stopping the girl going, is there?"

"Only this dear, she cannot go in her day dress, all the other young ladies will be in ball gowns." Emily, knowing her husband, thought it best to tackle one problem at a time, the carriage and chaperone could wait for the time being.

"Ah, so that's what all this is about, well I suppose we will just have to buy one for Annabelle." George saw the extra five pounds going nowhere. A year's wages for some of the working classes, but never mind, cannot have a to do in the house otherwise nothing will get done, he thought to himself. To his wife he said.

"What do you suggest, my dear."

"I was thinking of Cheltenham, there are some fine ladies dress shops there, and I am sure one of them will have the perfect gown for Annabelle."

George thought to himself *yes and a perfect price too* but to Emily he merely said he thought she should go with their daughter as alterations may be necessary and there was not that much time to the fourteenth.

"Good" said Emily, clapping her hands for joy, "we will go this morning."

Off she went in search of her daughter to impart the good news, and by eleven o'clock the pair were seated in a second-class carriage of the Great Western Railway bound for Cheltenham Spa.



High Street, Cheltenham.

After luncheon at the Montpellier Hotel, they visited all the dress shops and eventually purchased two evening gowns complete with bustles, one each, as they decided that

mother should go to chaperone her daughter. Annabelle was old enough to go alone, but it would not be right and proper. As Annabelle's dress needed some small alteration it was decided to leave both gowns and the shoes, taking with them only the gloves and reticule (evening handbag). Emily had swept out of the shop having given the shop girl her visiting card, stating that she would have the gowns and shoes collected in two days' time, having checked that the items would be ready by then, and commanding that the bill be sent to her husband, also ordering a cab to take them to the railway station.

Arriving at Cheltenham Spa railway station, there was a thirty-five-minute wait for the next train to Hereford stopping at Western-under-Penyard halt, fortunately there were seats available in the ladies waiting room, they were both very tired after searching for the right gowns. When the train drew into the station, they discovered that there was only one ladies only and one non-smoking compartment in second class and there were no seats available in either, both being already occupied, and thus they had to make do without. They chose a compartment where only one gentleman was seated, and as they entered, he rose to offer them a window seat, and bid them a good afternoon. A particularly jovial character who became difficult to ignore, dressed in bottle green trousers with faint large yellow lines forming squares, a canary yellow waistcoat and across his ample belly was a silver watch chain, and to complete the assembly he wore a white shirt, bright red bow tie, and a black frock coat. They also noticed a grey bowler hat on the seat beside him. The gentleman introduced himself as Johnson, Samuel Johnson adding that most people knew him as Sam.



Cheltenham Spa Railway Station.

With a jolt and a blast of smoke and steam from the chimney the train began to move out of the station. Sam withdrew a large cigar from his coat pocket and a vesta case suspended on one end of the watch chain. Selecting a vesta, he proceeded to light the cigar blowing clouds of smoke all around. Next appeared a silver hip flask from which he took frequent swigs.

“Had a good day.” Declared Sam, “Always do well at Cheltenham, great racecourse, do you go?”

The ladies shook their heads not wishing to give encouragement. Sam turned to the copy

of the Morning Post which resided unnoticed under his bowler hat, and opening the newspaper entertained the ladies with selected extracts, mainly criminal and colonial.

“I see that chap who murdered his wife in Norwich has been found guilty. Judge condemned him to death. He’ll probable hang next week, good riddance I say, we don’t want types such as him about, never know what they may get up to next.”

After a short pause Sam continued. “Pity there’s no more public hangings, my old man and I used to enjoy a good hanging, saw Michael Barrett swing we did, 26th May, 1868. Lived in London then, we did, walked to Newgate early morning, and got a good place, clear view of it all.”

He turned back to the newspaper then after a few minutes he started again.

“See ‘ere, there’s this native woman stoned to death in the Sudan for adultery. Native justice of course, we would never do anything so barbaric. Funny old world, ai’nt it, here women commit adultery when they’re stoned, a what!” And he roared with laughter at his own joke, while Emily looked annoyed, and Annabelle smiled supressing laughter.

Do either of you two ladies ever go to the races, great day out, ‘specially the Derby on Epsom Downs, absolutely bloody marvellous, then quickly remembering himself he hastily apologised, quickly adding “I thought not, not quite your cup of tea is it, still takes all types.” As the train arrived at East Gate railway station in Gloucester, Sam gathered up his hat and newspaper, bidding the two-adieu declaring he was off to Chepstow for another meeting.

Once he was gone both mother and daughter heaved a sigh of relief and tried to assess between them if he, that is Mr. Johnson, is a bookmaker or a gambler, they found it difficult to decide and were still discussing the matter when the train came to the halt at Western-under-Penyard.



The Halt at Western-under-Penyard.

The visit to Cheltenham had been an opportunity to obtain extra new items to complete their dresses, new shoes, gloves, and a reticule (handbag) for Annabelle. Over dinner the purchases were disclosed to George, and although the two ladies had been apprehensive regarding the cost, their fears were dissipated by George’s reaction when he seemed only too pleased that the pair had enjoyed themselves and merely nodded when Emily

mentioned that the bills would come to him by post, and that one of the boys would be required the day after tomorrow to collect the purchases from the shop in the High Street.

During the days leading up to the Ball there was a buzz of excitement within the Ashbourne household as speculation as to who would be there was repeatedly and endlessly discussed. The latest copy of the "Young Ladies Journal" was scoured to ensure that nothing had been overlooked, while George procured a brougham to take his wife and daughter to the Chase, a distance of some two miles.



The Chase.

Smith, one the lads employed as a wheelwright had been duly despatched to Cheltenham to collect the gowns and shoes, which all fitted to perfection. In due course Emily and Annabelle arrived at the Ball to be greeted in the entrance hall by a liveried footman who gave Annabelle her dance programme for the evening and took their wraps. There was a queue to enter the Ball Room where a major domo announced their names, after which they were welcomed by the General and Lady Lucy.



General Sir James William Howard Fitzmayor, KCB.

Perambulating to the Ball Room the ladies were met by a footman with a tray of champagne flutes which he deftly held in one hand balancing the tray on outstretched fingers and thumb whilst passing drinks to the guests with his right hand. At one end of the Ball Room sat an eight-piece orchestra who were playing a waltz to which a number of guests were dancing, a swirl of rich fabric and lace supported by gentlemen either in white tie and tails or the dress uniform of their regiment, mostly either bright red or dark blue.

As the orchestra ceased to play on conclusion of the dance there was a noticeable murmur of activity as various gentlemen attempted to complete their dance programmes, approaching ladies, and requesting the honour of a dance, whereupon the lady being consulted would refer to her programme and select an item not already reserved, and the gentleman's name would be entered against the appropriate number. It was considered the height of bad manners, low class breeding and insulting to the family for a lady to refuse

without particular good reason. Annabelle, who was after all, young and attractive, soon achieved a stream of admirers curious to discover knowledge of the young lady they could not recall having seen before, and Annabelle's dance programme was soon complete. There was now good reason to decline the johnny come late lies, there were now none free.

Emily was delighted that her daughter had been so successful, for an unknown to achieve a completed programme so quickly was most unusual she thought. Annabelle was not quite so optimistic but was at pains to avoid any display of ungratefulness. She had collected two subalterns, a lieutenant of the 5th Hussars with his dark blue tunic complete with frogging, and a second lieutenant of the 28th Regiment of Foot, the North Gloucestershire Regiment, together with a major of the 93rd Regiment of Foot, the Sutherland Highlanders wearing the regiment's dress uniform complete with tartan kilt. There was also a Royal Navy rather shy sub lieutenant, and more than half a dozen nonservice gentlemen.

During the interval between dances Annabelle joined her mother who reposed on one of the many seats surrounding the Ball Room. She was keen to relate to Emily details of the conversation she had just had with her first dance partner, George Churchward, carriage works manager at the "Great Western" in Swindon, and talked about railways, very interesting, but not what she really wished to hear about. But Emily was in conversation with Lady Lucy who was adding her personal welcome to her guests. Annabelle was disturbed to hear, as Lady Lucy moved away, that one of the two ladies to her mother's left remarked to the other with a sniff of disapproval, "Only trade, I thought we had not seen them before." To which the other responded, a lady wearing a glittering tiara, "Now, now Gwendolyn, there are worse goings on than trade, a college for ladies at Girton near Cambridge was completed last year, think of that we will all be ordered about by brazen hussies the daughters of factory workers, with bits of paper stating they now have a degree of some sort. It's the end of law and order, and they will all be suffragists, absolutely terrible!"

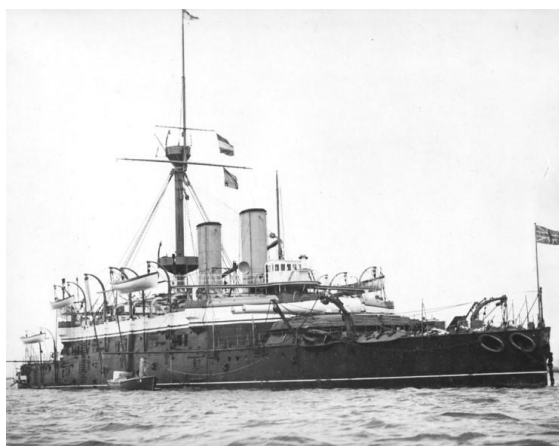
Annabelle did not know what to make of the exchange she had just unintentionally overheard. The accusation of "being merely trade" did not bother her, it usually came from ladies who were unhappy themselves, but what about college education for girls. Education of girls was nothing new, reading, writing, arithmetic and Olympic classics were all subjects any accomplished young lady would need to master for household management, but directly competing with their fathers, brothers and husbands was another matter, quite unthinkable. Why any young lady would wish to was quite beyond her comprehension.

Before Annabelle had reached any form of conclusion the next item commenced and her partner appeared to claim the dance, Major Andrew McK..... of the 93rd Regiment of Foot, who entertained his dance partner by relating how at Balaklava in '54, commanded by the redoubtable Colonel Sir Colin Campbell, the regiment had repelled charging Russian cavalry without forming a square, the "thin red line," damned fine show he had said. He was an excellent dancer but many years her senior, and although she tried, she could not find any enthusiasm for his talk of the Crimean War and had never liked Baron Tennyson's poem "the Charge of the Light Brigade" describing an event on the same day.



The Thin Red Line, 1881 by the Scottish artist Robert Gibb, RSA, (1845 – 1932).

For Annabelle the evening was an exciting whirl of activity with one dance and dancing partner seemingly following another till her head spun with unaccustomed excitement. There was a very tall and slim gentleman who reminded her of pictures she had seen of Arthur Balfour, the Chief Secretary for Ireland, could he be one and the same, it seemed unlikely.



HMS Rodney.

She did prefer the shy sub lieutenant, recently commissioned at Dartmouth, who informed Annabelle that he hoped to be joining the new battleship HMS Rodney when her fitting out had been completed, expected by early summer.

Of all her dance partners, including the dashing cavalry lieutenant, Annabelle preferred the manager of a tea garden in East Bengal, a Mr. Nigel Edwardes, who talked most enthusiastically of the country around Darjeeling its sights, sounds and scent; of the delightful and congenial climate especially when compared to the plains. He reserved his greatest praise for the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway the construction of which had enabled tea to be transported to the port at Calcutta a distance of over four hundred miles with a change to standard gauge railway at Siliguri Junction. The narrow-gauge railway had been opened only seven years earlier Nigel had informed Annabella, and although he was too young to know from personal experience, far more efficient than bullock cart.



Darjeeling Himalayan Railway

There was a supper served in the Dining Room at 11.30 with carriages called for the guests to depart from 3.20 am. Annabella was in a complete whirl; never had she been whisked off her feet so frequently it made her head spin with excitement. Such attention from so many charming young gentlemen, they all seemed to kaleidoscope together so that afterwards the young lady had great difficulty distinguishing one from the another. But it was marvellous, and she would not have missed the Ball for anything.

ooooooooOooooooooo

Written in 1891 by Charles K. Harris, “After the Ball” was a song in $\frac{3}{4}$ waltz time, which became extremely popular after John Philip Sousa performed the music at the Chicago World Fair in 1893. Gramophone recordings by both George J. Gaskin and John Yorke Atlee sold to an eager public in the United States, and here in Great Britain George Lashwood performed renditions of the song to enthusiastic music hall audiences.

Below is the refrain, which was included in both the stage and film versions of “Showboat” of 1936 and 1951 to invoke the atmosphere of the 1890’s. I have omitted the verses as the whole song would be too space consuming.

After the ball is over,
After the break of morn—
After the dancers' leaving;
After the stars are gone;
Many a heart is aching,
If you could read them all;
Many the hopes that have vanished,
After the ball.



The Morning after the Ball, 1891.

By the American artist Abraham. Archibald Anderson (1846 – 1940). Illustrated above is the etching by Eugene Champollion from the Magazine of Art published by Cassell & Company, Limited, 1891.

Saucy Sophia's Snippets



Grande Taverne Bar by Xavier Sager, 1900's

The French artist Xavier Sager, who was born in 1870 produced numerous illustrations for postcards, calendars, and music scores from his Parisian studio between 1900 and 1914. He died in 1930.

Trailer for next month.

Edward travels to Berlin in pursuit of a diplomatic or military career in Government service but Alexandra is far from happy. There are grave events which he does not anticipate with mighty international repercussions to follow in the years to come.

Dorian M. Osborne

1st March, 2024.