

# The Private Life of the Kaiser

From the Papers and Diaries of the Baroness von Larisch-Reddern, the Kaiser and Kaiserin's Late Major Domo, Chief of the Royal Household at Berlin and Potsdam.

(Continued from last Sunday.)

I have sometimes hinted that the Imperial German Court was "financially embarrassed." I will show that the Kaiser was not miserly in petty matters and an unscrupulous spendthrift. He was "peppy wise and pound foolish," he "robbed Peter to pay Paul," he was stingy with his friends and luxurious with himself. He was niggardly with his family and extravagant where his own wishes were concerned. I will show that at times he kept the court in downright poverty; his servants in actual want, and his own family "scimped."

His was a strange mixture of personalities, indeed—the little man whose ambition and greed led him to attempt to conquer the world.

**Kaiser's Wages \$4,000,000 a Year.** "But how is it possible?" asks the reader whose "Statesman's Year-Book" tells him that the Kaiser has an income of but \$4,000,000 per year, and who remembers, perchance, William's boastful speech in which he said he was the biggest landowner in Germany.

Whether the latter assertion is true I cannot say, but those four millions were a shining reality and unnumbered, save for the obligation to pay five appanages of \$15,000 each per annum to Prussian princes.

That left William \$3,800,000 a year to "bliss himself with," besides his private income of \$50,000 per month.

The \$50,000 formed the nucleus of His Majesty's private purse, and was always spoken for three months in advance for his uniform and toilet accounts, his private journeys and amusements.

The civil list discharged the cost of representation, the needs of the Kaiserin and the children, all the expenses of the household and provided funds for the maintenance of the royal theatres, palaces and gardens.

Out of a much smaller official income William I. saved an immense fortune, though he kept up a separate court for his Queen for thirty years, and, for a Prussian, was exceedingly liberal toward ladies that engaged his fancy.

**William is Always in Debt.** The present Kaiser actually wound up year after year with a tremendous deficit, and his court, outwardly splendid and richly endowed, was more penurious than that of the meanest prince of the empire.

Indeed, my maid assured me that at Buckenburgh, when the monarch received only as many marks as the President of the United States gets dollars per year, the grounds were better fed and lodged than under-stewards in Potsdam.

The reason for this is obvious enough. The Kaiser has no conception whatever of the value of money and ordered for himself anything that pleased him, what he saw and read about, without paying the least heed to the pecuniary consequences. If he desired an article, it must be procured in the quickest possible manner.

I had noticed for some time that a certain dealer in flowers on Unter den Linden served me with excessive zeal, though my purchases were not extensive by any means. My carriage no sooner stopped at his door when this Jerome Napoleon, went to the capital of Saxony to confer with the great Emperor.

As De Simeon entered Napoleon's room the Emperor grabbed him by the coat and said: "Off with you to Paris. I want 325,000 men within the next six weeks. You arrange that."

De Simeon tried to protest: "But your majesty has just lost a million men." "A million men—this for your million men," cried Napoleon, and, snapping his fingers, he pushed De Simeon out of the door, bidding him not to lose a moment.

"Well," said the florist, "you belong to the court and pay cash. For that reason I would rather sell you a 3-mark bouquet than a 50-mark flower piece to the lady you mention or (and he lowered his voice) to even the Emperor or Empress."

"I am a well-to-do man, thank the Lord; but when it comes to waiting a year and a half before one's bills are paid by the royal treasury I feel like cursing my appointment. And the worst of it is the All-Highest example is followed by almost everybody connected with the court."

**Had No Fixed Income.** But nothing illustrates the unsettled state of the royal finances more thoroughly than the fact that the Kaiserin had no certain income of her own. Her court-marshal was obliged to fight for every dollar required beyond the ordinary pay of servants and help with the Kaiser's court and house marshals, who often refused to grant necessary funds until Augusta Victoria's express commands compelled them to honor the disputed bills.

A rather amusing incident of that sort happened a few months after the enthronization, when my mistress ordered me to buy a little bed, together with the necessary clothes, for Prince Oscar (born July 27 that year). It was my good fortune to find at Mosse Brothers, Jaeger Strasse, the exact article Her Majesty wanted, and when the bed was sent up she was greatly pleased.

"We will keep it right here," she said, "and, that there may be no misunderstanding, take the bill and order it paid immediately."

"And since when are ladies of the court authorized to make purchases without previous estimate by this office?" asked the Baron, after listening to my request.

"I don't know," I answered, "and besides, I have not come here to answer riddles."

"Then," said the house marshal, jolly, "accept my compliments, together with the information that this bill is irregular, extravagant and unnecessary; hence it will not be paid. The baby can sleep in his cradle six months longer; by that time we shall be able to buy him a bed in the regular way."

"Then it is your pleasure that the little Prince be taken out of the new bed and put back into the cradle?"

"It will do him no harm, and give me much satisfaction."

**Deficiency in William's Mentality.** This matter of finance and business is clearly a deficiency in William's mental makeup; as some people lack a sense of locality, so the Emperor happens to be destitute of a proper comprehension of values.

Maybe that explains in part, at least, the Kaiser's callousness during the great war. When Ludendorff explained to him that his projected July offensive would cost a million German lives at the very least, Wilhelm said: "Go ahead," with no more emotion than he might display when he ordered his path.

And this recalls an experience had by a relative of the editor of these memoirs. When Napoleon arrived at Dresden after the retreat from Moscow, Mr. Fisher's grandfather, the Comte de Simeon, Primes Minister of Jerome Napoleon, went to the capital of Saxony to confer with the great Emperor.

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OF and on I heard of cases of poverty, even of destitution, in the servants' families, for which they dared not ask for relief in the most likely place, of their master or mistress, who caused it to be known once and for all that they must not be annoyed with their servants' personal concerns.

In the beautiful Christmas season, I thought surely their Majesties would make up for it. Picture, then, my amazement when I heard the Kaiser say to Her Majesty at the beginning of Holy Week: "I have cautioned Heisener (a privy counselor, who administered the royal purse) to pay the customary 10 marks (\$2.50) only to those lackeys and maids who wait upon me personally. It will be well for you to instruct Baron von Mirbach similarly, or you will run the risk of feeding a whole tribe of men and girls who are merely second or third assistants."

William's valets, I heard later on, received 40 marks (\$10) from their imperial master at Christmas gratuity; all his other attendants, men and women, had to be content with the customary 10 marks "for ginger-bread."

**Miserly With His Servants.** "And that is the only drink money the Kaiser dispenses all the year 'round," complained the wife of one of the wardrobe men, who did my plain sewing, "outside of Christmas, he never

seems to have a copper for his body-servants, although himself continuously in want of stimulants (he often drinks four or five egg cognacs in the course of the day). It never strikes him that his overworked attendants might feel like stepping across the way to the canteen and 'crook an arm.'"

William, who is nothing if not a slave to tradition, revived a habit of several of his ancestors—namely, to stroll out of his palace gates as an ordinary mortal once a year, on holy night, when he donned a subdued civilian dress and when no adjutant or any one of the body service was allowed to follow him—a general order that, however, did not apply to the secret police, which were made acquainted with the Kaiser's every outdoor move beforehand, and had its guardian angels about wherever and whenever he was in the open.

The war lord walked through the park behind the Neues Palais toward Ban Souché and often rambled beyond the gates of the ancient chateau, wishing a "Merry Christmas" to and distributing small gold pieces among needy persons he came across.

**Santa Mere Limited Than Ever.** It was ordinarily a novel amusement for the Kaiser and a fairly profitable one for the poor men and women who happened to attract his attention while his pockets were still lined; that is, while his charity fund of 200 marks

(Continued on Page Sixteen.)

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