

Felix Flatow

A German Gymnast at the Olympic Games of 1896 The Story of a Postcard

By Karl Rathjen

During a sale in the autumn of 1993 in Kiel, I found a postcard which was being sold as a card with an Olympic franking, dating the year 1896, this obviously being the reason for the card's high price. And apart from that there were supposed to be some signatures made by unknown persons on the card. Having been hesitant initially I bought the card, for it was addressed to "Leo Flatow" and signed "Your Felix". Being a connoisseur of the participants of the Olympic Games in Athens in 1896, I knew that it had to be the famous gymnast Gustav Felix Flatow who had written this card. So I bought

this card and had a closer look at it at home. I could not read the contents of the card, since it was written in a type of shorthand unknown to me. But the signatures on the card were of importance, for nearly all members of the successful German gymnastic team had signed their names. There stood the names of: Conrad Böcker, winner with the team for horizontal bar and parallel bars, Georg Hillmar, winner with the team for horizontal bar and parallel bars, Fritz Hofmann, second place in the 100 metres and third place in the 400 metres. Hofmann was the leader of the German gymnastic squad. Fritz Manteuffel, winner



with the team for horizontal bar and parallel bars, and Carl Schuhmann, winner of horse vaulting and wrestling, winner with the team for horizontal bar and parallel bars, According to the Gregorian Calendar the card was written on the 13th of April, 1896. Only after protracted efforts, over the chairman of the Schleswig Stenographer's Club, was it possible to decipher the contents of the card with the help of an expert. It was written in an unusual shorthand: in Alt-Stoltze. Felix Flatow wrote to Berlin : "My dears, as you already know all of us gymnasts were invited to a dinner with the king. We dined for over three hours, on five courses, it was splendid. Afterwards we were all introduced to the king who was very pleased for us and talked to each one of us. The crown prince and all the princes were present too etc.. etc. The distribution of the prizes is at two o'clock. We are leaving on the 16th and I should think be arriving between the 20th and the 22nd. I have written a letter to Leo that he will hopefully take notice of. Should Karl be asked, he should say that he wrote a card that he would be arriving on the 20th or the 21st. Many, many regards, Your Felix." The following annotation was also on the card: "Dear Leo ! Take good care of our bikes! I am definitely relying on that. Best wishes, Felix." The contents of this card shows that the German gymnastic team was the guest of the King of Greece. The distribution of the prizes did not take place at the time that was mentioned. It was postponed for a day due to perpetual rain. The postcard was stamped on April the 2nd, 1896. The original will take a special place in my collection.

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