

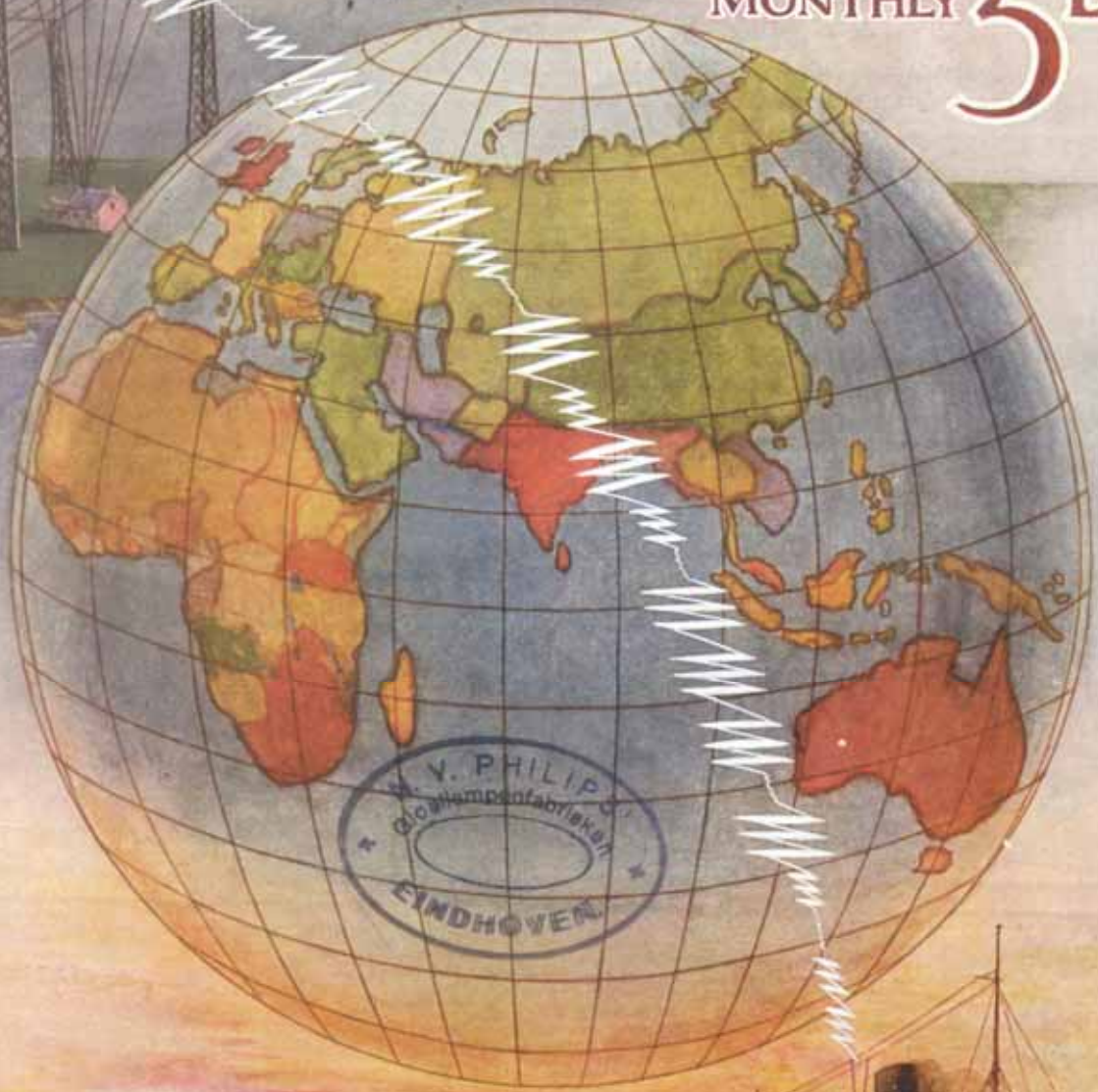
WIRELESS

Bib. Nat. Lab.
reg. Bib. Centr.

WORLD

14. MRT 1922

MONTHLY 3^D





CODE

*A story of an intercepted message
and what came of it.*

By J. W. T. WALSH.

I.

THE MESSAGE AND ITS MEANING.

"NOTHING much doing to-night," said Roger Blake, as he handed over the 'phones to his friend and fellow-enthusiast, Jack Faucet.

They were sitting in a small shed at the bottom of the garden where John Faucet had rigged up a small receiving set in his spare time. Spare time was a commodity rather scarce to a young doctor with a fairly extensive practice in a small isolated country town like Armidale, but Faucet was one of those keen men who can always find time for doing anything they have set their heart upon. He had come down from the 'Varsity full of enthusiasm for wireless and with a firm resolve to have a receiving set of his own as soon as he could find an opportunity of putting one together. The outcome of this resolve and the fruit of many months' patient labour was a very creditable receiving station, with which he used frequently to amuse himself by trying to pick up any messages that might be floating about the ether.

Blake had been his particular chum at college, and both had been signallers in the Officers Training Corps. As a result they had rapidly fallen under the fascination of the "dot-dash-dot." Many a pleasant evening had they spent in each other's rooms, practising with a dummy-key or buzzer, and both, before they said good-bye to 'Varsity life, had become quite proficient amateurs in the gentle art of Morse-reading.

While Faucet was going through the Hospital they had only seen each other at wide intervals, but now that he had settled

down to practice their meetings were more frequent. Blake, whose profession carried him from place to place, so that he had no settled home, always looked forward to a short stay with his old chum whenever he got a few days' leave, and it would be impossible to say which of them most enjoyed these reunions. They could then compare notes and talk about old times and all the fellows whom they used to know at college, but who had since drifted out of sight. An added attraction, of course, was the wireless set, and to-night they had been sitting together in the shed taking it in turns to listen to whatever might be going on.

There was not much doing. FL had not yet begun to send out news, while KAV was rather indistinct—besides which, they were neither of them great German scholars. It was a favourite trick of Faucet's to "sweep" for signals; that is, he would travel along the whole gamut of wavelengths on the off-chance of picking up any stray messages that might be audible. As he took the 'phones the idea came into his head to try this now.

For a few minutes there seemed to be nothing about, and Blake was just going into the house for two cups of something warm—the shed was rather exposed, there was a fairly strong wind blowing, and the temperature was that of a cold, bleak November night—when he was stopped by an exclamation from Faucet, whose attention had suddenly been attracted by a faint call. It was sharply tuned on an unusual wavelength, and if he had not been purposely "sweeping" for messages he would un-

doubtedly have missed it. Rapidly he began to take it down:—

“ . . . ace by hew dress aver visit enim
dieser travelled passe an atom break all all
at crowing ail a gash outer his above een
ambrose to honor errat errat add eye action
train tremor moon a faible log a dice sky
ash ate none none all leave none 52197065.
323580 — . . . — CCC . . . — . . .
— . . . — ” Then everything relaxed
into silence.

“ You don't seem to have picked up much after all, Faucet,” said Blake, as he looked over the result of his friend's efforts. “ Some amateur practising sending, I suppose.”

“ It certainly looks like it,” agreed Faucet, “ but the funny part of it is that the sending was not at all like an amateur's. It was perfectly regular and deliberate all through, without any clipping or dragging. I'm sure I couldn't have sent half as well. Besides, why should he practise sending on his transmitter at all? Hasn't he got a buzzer or something else he can use without annoying other people? And what is the meaning of those three C's at the end? That isn't a miscellaneous signal, is it?”

Quick as thought he took down the Signalling Manual and looked it up.

“ No, I thought as much; there is no such signal as CCC. It bears a faint resemblance to the cipher signal, doesn't it? By Jove! I wonder if it's not as stupid as it looks. The question is——”

“ Lend it me for a minute, will you?” said Blake. “ I used to be rather a 'nut' at deciphering codes in my younger days, but I expect I'm a bit out of practice now! Let me think a minute. It can't be a simple letter transposition because the groups are real words. That puts all those complicated keyword ciphers out of court, too, and I only know of three other systems in general use. In one of these each word or phrase has its own code word to represent it, so that you need a code book to decipher a message of that kind. I don't think that is the system they have used here, because, you see, in no less than three instances there is a word repeated, and one does not often intentionally use the same word twice running in an ordinary message. Another wheeze is simply to leave the words of the message in clear and mix them up as if you had put them all in a hat and drawn them out



Both seized their hats and made for the Police Station.

haphazard. That, however, is rather a risky practice if any of the words are at all distinctive, and here we have a mixture of four different languages, so I think that, too, is out of the question. The only other system I know of is the simplest of all, and a very favourite one with the amateur cryptographer who doesn't want to be bothered with a key or other paraphernalia. He just puts in a lot of unnecessary letters according to some prearranged plan, so that he gets a series of words which, at first sight, don't look like a code message at all. That is one of the advantages of the system. All the reader has to do is to pick out the letters at stated intervals, when the message appears in clear at once. This is most probably the system they have used here; at any rate, I mean to try it and see how it works. Let's take the first few words for a start and run them all together so: ‘ . . . acebyhewdressavervisitenimdiesertravelled . . . ’ Now put down every other letter. This gives us either ‘ aeyedesvriieideetaeld ’ or ‘ cbhwrsaevstnmisrrvle. ’ Neither of those is any good. Now try every third letter. Starting with the ‘ a ’ we get ‘ aberseitüerec, ’ which

is no better than the other two. The 'b' gives us 'cywearsemerald'—Hallo! What's this? Now, I think, we have found the key," and rapidly he proceeded to write out the remainder of the message.

Faucet, looking over his shoulder, quickly cut up the string of letters into its component words and read as follows: "... cy wears emeralds at ball to-night have motor ready corner of Blackstone Lane 10.30."

Even as he read it the extraordinary nature of the message flashed across the minds of both men, and, as if by a single impulse, each looked at the other and exclaimed "What on earth does this mean?"

Light came rapidly.

"It seems to me," said Blake, "that we have somehow stumbled upon a message meant to be read by no one but the man to whom it was sent. That mention of a motor in the consequent when the antecedent contains the word 'emeralds' is suspicious, to say the least of it. What a pity you didn't get the whole message, Jack!"

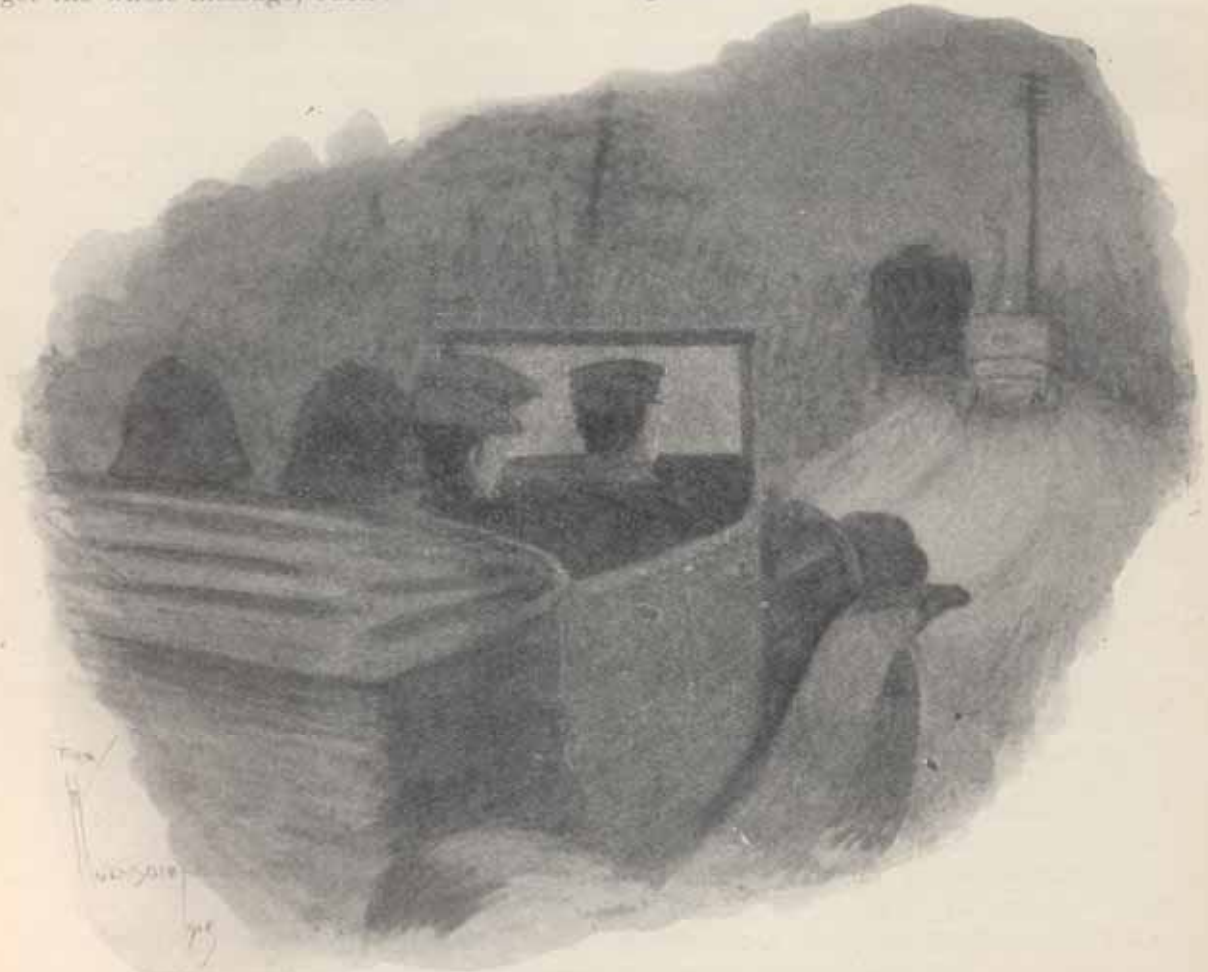
"It certainly does look fishy," agreed Faucet, "but as things stand I don't see what we can do. That '... cy' at the beginning is most tantalising. Anyway, I suppose we ought to let the police know of our discovery and perhaps they may be able to make a better guess than we can as to the missing portion. We'd better look sharp, too. It's nearly 10 o'clock now, and the reference in the message is to 10.30, so we haven't a second to spare."

Quickly Blake turned out the light and locked up the shed, while Faucet went into the house to tell his landlady that they were going out for a short stroll before turning in for the night. As soon as Blake came in, both seized their hats and made for the Police Station faster than either of them had run for the last five years or more.

II.

THE CHASE AND ITS CONCLUSION.

Arrived at the station, Faucet quickly explained the matter to the inspector in



Round a bend in the road there came into sight a lumbering country cart.

charge, who was at first inclined to be sceptical, scenting a possible hoax with unpleasant "consequences" from headquarters. On the other hand, there might be something in it, and, if so, it seemed to offer chances of distinguished service, chances so often wished for, and so seldom obtained, by the police inspector of a small country town. Drunkenness, petty thefts, desertions, and poaching formed the usual routine. But here, to all appearance, was something conceived on a grander scale than anything he had previously dealt with, something that would create a momentary sensation, with perhaps a column in the London papers and certainly a page or more in the local *Gazette*.

Even the wild possibility of seeing his photograph at the head of a lurid description of an exciting chase and capture entered the inspector's head and refused to be dislodged. Chances of promotion, moreover, were few and far between, and his present salary barely adequate to the needs of a steadily growing family. Finally, he decided to take the risk.

The interpretation of the message gave no difficulty. Blackstone Lane he knew well for a lonely country road about 15 miles from Armidale on the main road to Gesborough. It was absolutely deserted at night, and the very place to hide a motor. Close by was "The Grange," the country seat of Lord Dacy, and one of the largest houses in the county. The inspector took down a book and searched for a few minutes. What he found there obviously scattered any remaining doubts as to the genuineness of the message, for there was no hesitation in his manner as he asked the two friends whether they would like to see the matter to its conclusion. With alacrity both accepted, and in a very short time they were seated with two constables in a motor-car rapidly driven by the inspector along the Gesborough Road.

For a quarter of an hour no one spoke as they tore along the deserted road. Half-past ten and they were still five miles from Blackstone Lane, when they saw a large car coming towards them at a speed almost equal to their own. Could that be the car they were in search of, or was it some visitor returning early from the ball?

Quick as thought the inspector slowed the

car down until she was almost at a standstill; then steered her across the road as if he were trying to turn round, so that he temporarily blocked the passage of the oncoming car. He could hear the grind of her wheels skidding along the sandy road as her driver jammed the brakes on. Then from within the motor an impatient voice, which the inspector recognised as that of one of the wealthiest residents of Armidale, could be heard inquiring in angry tones what was the matter. An apology from the inspector left nothing possible but a somewhat curt acceptance; the offending car was rapidly turned into her original direction, and both proceeded swiftly on their respective journeys.

"Lost us nearly ten minutes of precious time," growled the inspector, as he looked at the car's clock.

Another minute and they were in sight of the corner where Blackstone Lane entered the main road, and even as they looked they could see a large car without lights move slowly out of the lane and start off down the main road in front of them.

"There she is," came from between the inspector's closed teeth as he gripped the steering wheel and started in pursuit.

At first it seemed as if the occupants did not know that they were being followed, but as the car behind swept past the house without slackening speed and turning in as they expected, some suspicion seemed to cross them that all was not well, and their speed rapidly increased. Soon both cars were travelling at nearly the same speed. A few minutes more and then:

"She's gaining on us," jerked out the inspector as he saw the car in front slowly pull ahead.

Evidently hers were the more powerful engines.

But just at this critical moment the unexpected happened. Round a bend in the road there came into sight a lumbering country cart piled high with produce for the Gesborough market. The driver, with typical rural indifference to other traffic and in conformity with the usual practice of country carts, was calmly occupying the centre of the road. The driver of the first car made a frantic effort on the horn to clear a passage in time. Fruitless attempt to hasten that which was only meant to crawl! The



A shot from the Inspector brought down the lighter man of the two.

horses had scarcely begun to turn their heads when he was upon them. Swiftly he steered to try and pass, but there was no room. One of the front wheels dashed over the path and into the ditch at the side.

Seeing what had happened, the inspector jammed on the brakes just in time to avoid a collision. The fugitives, quickly realising the danger of the situation, quitted the car and made off down the road at their utmost speed. Their pursuers were not far behind.

The chase was short.

A shot from the inspector brought down the lighter man of the two who was in front, while Faucet, who in his college days had always carried off the sprinting races, was more than a match for the other, whom he secured single-handed. Both men were unarmed, having left everything in the car when they abandoned it.

A short search revealed a small attaché case under the seat of the stranded motor, and on opening this the inspector found, lying loose in the corner, the famous Dacy emeralds, which had been handed down in that family for countless generations.

The man in front, whom the inspector soon recognised as one of the most daring

and ingenious cracksmen known to the police, was not seriously injured. A very short time saw both men, handcuffed and with a constable apiece, in the police car with the inspector as driver. Meanwhile Faucet and Blake took charge of the other car, and with the help of two horses from the cart soon had her righted and on the road again.

While the inspector with his prisoners returned to Armidale, Faucet and Blake drove back to "The Grange," where they found everything in disorder and Lady Dacy in despair. A few words from Faucet to Lord Dacy, however, rapidly set all minds at ease, and then the two friends between them told the story of the secret message. At its close Lord Dacy came up to them, shook both men warmly by the hand, and expressed his gratitude in words of glowing admiration for the young lawyer's brilliant acumen and ready wit.

There is now a complete wireless station at "The Grange." Under Faucet's direction Lord and Lady Dacy have both taken up the fascinating study, and are now keen amateurs of the new science which saved for them the treasured heirloom of their house.