



POST OFFICE TELEGRAPHS.

No. of Telegram

Office Stamp.

If the accuracy of an Enclosed Telegram be doubted, the Telegram will be repeated on payment of half the amount...

Charge to pay

2/5/87

From to of South

8.45 p.m.

Received here at 9.17 p.m.

TO Anthony Usina 10 Whitechapel Road Whitechapel Road London East

Look Out

Handwritten initials

N.B.—This Form must accompany any inquiry made respecting this Telegram.

A TELEGRAPH MYSTERY.

WRITTEN FROM THE OPERATOR'S NOTES.

By W. B. NORTHROP.

Illustrated by H. H. Flere.

OPPOSITE the west front of the General Post Office there stood, not many years ago, a small house, one room of which was let to certain clerks occupied in the Central Telegraph Office...

On these occasions it was customary for someone to read a paper upon some topic of interest to the assembly, after which the names of all present would be written upon separate slips of paper, placed in a deep bowl, and one of these slips selected, at random, by an appointed person.

When a paper had been read, it was handed over to the secretary of the club—which had received the name of "The Tell-tale Bowl"—who kept the manuscripts until the end of the year, at which time a committee awarded a prize to the writer whose experience was considered the most interesting.

Owing to certain changes taking place in the Central Telegraph Office, the club was dissolved after an existence of six

years, and the various members abandoned the idea of meeting elsewhere. Not long ago, the house in which "The Tell-tale Bowl" members used to meet was removed for the purpose of improvements upon the west front of the Post Office, and during the demolition one of the workmen found a tin box hidden away under the flooring of the room in which the club formerly assembled. This box contained many manuscripts, one of which was marked "Prize for year 188-, awarded to F— G—, Honourable President of 'The Tell-tale Bowl.'"

This remarkable story has come into my possession, and here it is:—

I am a telegraphist—I have been one for thirteen years. I am not a superstitious man—rather the other way—having always laughed at ghost stories, omens, premonitions, and so forth, putting them down to a diseased mental faculty on the part of the believer. I had been brought up to regard superstitious people as "afflicted."

I held this opinion until something a little out of the natural way came directly under my own observation. I must confess

to being more or less a convert to the other side since the strange event happened which I am about to relate. I do not claim it was positively supernatural, or anything of that sort. I myself might have become "afflicted." But strange it was, and I have never been able to account for it.

I had occupied the position of telegraph operator for four years in one of the London offices, doing the ordinary work of the "Met.," or Metropolitan district, when I was placed where I had a great deal of the press work to handle, and was kept "on the go" nearly all the time. I worked until 2.45 every morning, going on duty at 7.30 at night.

One night, just as I was about to go off duty, a rather peculiar dispatch came over the wires. It was addressed to a man living in the East End somewhere, and all it said was "Look out." It was signed simply with the initial "H." This was the last message I received before going off duty, for, owing to sickness at my home, I had received permission to go home early on this particular evening. Placing the message in the "cage," or rack, I called the check boy, and reported off duty, going directly home.

Before going to bed that night, I happened to step out into the hall, and my attention was attracted by a light in the bath-room, the door of which stood partly open. Looking into the room, I saw no one, but found that a lamp had been left burning. This was somewhat unusual, so I stepped into the room to put the lamp out. One of the taps of the water tank was turned on a trifle, and a little water dripped upon the bottom of the bath.

Somehow or other, this dripping caught my attention, and, before leaving the room, just as I had blown out the lamp, I stopped and listened. The drops from the tap seemed to come in a peculiar, irregular, jerky way; and, as I paused, I said to myself, almost mechanically, "That sounds to me like a message." Then I read off the drop—drop; drop—drop—drop; and, sure enough, when I put it all together, it was a message. It repeated several times, "Look out; look out," and then there would be a pause, followed by just the initial "H." I did not like this exactly, for it seemed I was allowing my fancy, or imagination, to master me. I struck a match and relit the lamp. I then sat upon the edge of the bath and looked carefully at the tap. I watched the drops, and care-

fully went over the message, which came fast and often.

I could not, at first, remember where I had heard that message before. We operators receive so many messages of different descriptions—ciphers, and what not—that it is seldom a telegram finds its way into the inner consciousness, so to speak; they come and go by thousands. Suddenly, it dawned upon me that the water was making the same message I had taken just before leaving the office. I laughed at myself, and concluded that the water only sounded that way to me because it was the last dispatch I had received. But, still, I could not get the sound of that water out of my head, nor could I desist from coupling it with the message.

Another telegraphist had a room downstairs, and something possessed me to go down and get him to come and listen to the thing. The hour was now very late, and, of course, he had retired. He growled naturally at being thus disturbed, but, after a little persuasion, agreed to come upstairs with me.

I did not tell him what I had made the message out to be, but waited until he should hear it himself. He listened, and then said, instantly, "Why, 'tis a message! It says, 'Look out! look out!' and it is signed plain 'H.'" I told him that was how I also read it.

We both listened and watched for some little time. He wondered whence it had come, and to whom it was addressed; but I could not remember the name of the man to whom it had been sent—the name being a very peculiar one, Spanish in sound—and I did not tell my companion that I had received a message with the same words before leaving the office.

After laughing over the affair, my friend left me and again retired. I went to my room, but, feeling a little nervous, I did not go to bed, but sat up thinking over the matter. Finally, however, I arose from my table, where I had been sitting, went over to the mirror, and started to take off my tie, preparatory to undressing.

I was looking straight in the mirror, and pondering over the mysterious message, when, right in the room behind me, sitting at the table in the place I had just occupied, I saw a man writing. I was too astonished to turn around and face him. I could not take my eyes off his reflection in the glass.

The figure was that of a tall, slender man. His face was very colourless—looked more like putty than flesh and blood—and I noticed great dark rings under his eyes. I had seen a face like his at the Morgue once, and the green tint under the eyes of the corpse was exactly the same colour as that of the dark rings under the eyes of the man whose reflection I was looking at. As I looked, he took up my pen from the table and commenced writing, or rather printing, something on a large piece of blotting-paper which rested on the table. I watched his hand, and saw it trace a large "L." Then came two "O's," and then a "K." He then wrote another large "O," followed by a "U" and then a "T," which last letter he crossed heavily and put a period after. Then there was a pause, and he seemed to hesitate a long time. I knew perfectly well what the next letter would be—and it was a "H."

The figure then arose; and, not seeming to know I was anywhere in the room, or turning to look at me, or even to raise its head, it passed, without a sound, from the room through the open door into the hall.

I stood looking in the glass at the reflection of the door, too astonished to move, expecting to see the form return at any moment from the darkness of the hall.

The apparition did not return, however, and I managed to muster sufficient courage to step over to the blotting-pad to see what had been written. What was my amazement to find—not a word!

I went to the door and closed it softly, taking care to lock it as quickly as I could. I sat down bewildered, and wondering if I had not been asleep all this time, or what had happened.

How long I sat in this semi-dazed condition I do not know; but, presently, I heard the birds chirping outside, and knew that day had come. In my excited condition of mind, it was impossible to think of sleeping. I felt feverish, so I went to the window and opened it for a breath of cool air.

I looked down into the deserted street. At so early an hour, scarcely anyone is seen on the streets, and the footsteps of a passer-by will echo from house to house. I could have heard anyone coming down the street fifty yards away; yet, while I looked into the clear, steel-blue light of the coming day, I saw a man walking on the opposite pavement. His feet, as he walked

briskly along, made not the slightest sound, and I wondered much at this, for he walked with an apparently unrestrained and heavy step. As he drew immediately opposite my window, he seemed to slacken his pace. His back was partly turned toward me at first, as if he did not wish to be recognised; but, suddenly, he turned his face up, and looked directly at me. Our eyes met. There was an anxious expression on his face, and he waved his arm in the direction of the East End. What was my surprise to behold my strange visitant of the night!

Desperate at these mysteries, I leaned far out of the window and, as he walked away, called loudly after him. Whether he did not hear me, or did not care to notice me, I know not, but he paid no attention to my loud call—in fact, did not even look back, and I watched him go up the street until he disappeared around a corner.

I ran downstairs and out into the street intending to follow him. I reached the corner he had turned long before he could have arrived at the next street at the pace at which he was walking,



"AT THE TABLE IN THE PLACE I HAD JUST OCCUPIED I SAW A MAN WRITING"

but I could see him nowhere. Even had he hastened, he could not have passed out of sight so quickly.

As it was out of the question to think of going back to the house to sleep, I turned in the direction of the office, doing this mechanically. One will naturally turn toward the place which he usually frequents; and, in moments of excitement, we find we have gone almost unconsciously either to our homes or places of business. As I hurried along, a few early risers passed me, and one or two looked back at me curiously. I must have appeared excited, for my tie was loose, and the sitting up all night had not improved my appearance.

When I arrived at the office, of course, everyone was surprised to see me. I was not due till the evening. I explained that I was very nervous and could not sleep. I went to the message files, and looked over the forms for the message

signed with the initial "H." After a considerable search I found the

address on our duplicate office-copy, and something prompted me to go over to the East End. Of course, I knew it would be very officious for me to ask any questions of the recipient of the message; but, anyway, I decided to go over and take a look at the house.

As I walked rapidly along, I eagerly looked into the faces of all whom I saw, in a kind of fearful expectation of meeting the man I had seen twice already within a few hours, but with whom I had not been able to speak. When within a few houses of the number to which the message was addressed, I saw, down the street, and in about the section where the house would be, a great crowd of people. As I edged in among the throng, several stopped me and asked questions. I suppose they took me to be a detective. I told them I knew nothing of what had happened.

I worked my way through the crowd until I reached the door of a large tenement house, near which were gathered some of the motley, ragged, poverty-stricken types of the neighbourhood. Two policemen were keeping the crowd back from this door. One of these officers I happened to know, and I asked him what was the trouble. He replied—

"A horrible murder has just been committed in this house. You may go in if you like, but you won't stay long." I passed in and was conducted by a second policeman up a flight of rickety stairs.

As I entered a small room on the first floor, a most terrible sight met my eyes. I cannot describe it to you. Even now, as I recount this experience, my heart sickens. Suffice it to say that the body of a man was lying on the floor.

The face was mutilated beyond recognition. Blood was everywhere. A pool of it had trickled out along the floor and become dammed up at the threshold. A basin was upon the floor beside the body.

I turned away, almost fainting. Something about the body fascinated me, however, and riveted my attention. I became convinced that I had somewhere seen the man before. Of course, the face was too disfigured for me to recognise anyone; but the figure seemed very, very familiar to me. I closely watched the policeman as he searched the clothing for marks of identification. I was about to turn from the room, when the officer discovered in a pocket in the dead man's vest a thin



"WHAT WAS MY SURPRISE TO SEE MY STRANGE VISITOR OF THE NIGHT BEFORE."

folded piece of tissue paper. He opened it. It was the telegram. It read, "Look out," and was signed "H." I recognised at a glance the message. It was in my handwriting. I have attached it to this manuscript, as it came into my possession later on.

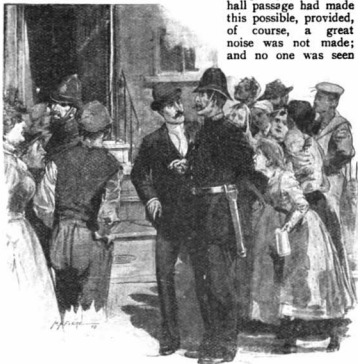
I staggered from the room, and, passing out into the street, took the first 'bus going in the direction of the Central Office, the 'busses having commenced running by this time. At the office I told my story to one of my fellow-telegraphists, and showed him the office-copy of the message. He was rather doubtful, however, and seemed to think I had allowed my imagination to get the better of me. So, after that, I told the tale to no one.

Before long, the office was besieged by detectives trying to obtain a clue to the murder. Questions were put to me, the files were examined, and all the usual promising preliminary detective-work gone through with. The message had been sent from Louth.

After weeks spent in fruitless search, and after no less than a dozen people suspected of the crime had been arrested, the detectives seemed to acknowledge themselves baffled, and gave up.

I kept wondering all the time why I had been picked out as the one around whom the strange occurrence was made to revolve, and the apparition—if such it were—and the murdered man were in my thoughts constantly. No one seemed to know who the man was, or what he looked like. The woman who kept the lodging-house in which the murder had been committed had only seen the murdered man once—the day he engaged and paid for the room—and, as he had paid two weeks in advance, she had not, as she put it,

"bothered with him at all, at all, after that." No sound was heard in his room when the deed was committed. The room being right over the hall passage had made this possible, provided, of course, a great noise was not made; and no one was seen



"A HORRIBLE MURDER HAS JUST BEEN COMMITTED IN THIS HOUSE," SAID THE POLICEMAN."

to leave or enter the house with blood upon his clothes.

Six months passed. The mystery was still unsolved, when, one night, while seated at my instrument, receiving, in one of the district offices to which I had asked to be transferred, a tall man entered the room, and, stepping up to the desk near the window, took down a form and started to write. His back was toward me, and I could only, at a glance, make out his figure, unless I turned completely around in my seat. Presently he finished writing his message and came up to the counter. Being alone in the office at the time, I had to take his message. As he came toward me, I turned my switch, and went to meet him at the counter. What was my astonishment upon looking up to see it was the apparition!

You may well imagine my consternation. The man—if it were a man—noticed my surprised look, and seemed in his turn to be surprised; nay, even alarmed. On his

coming quite close to me I noticed that the face was more fleshy-looking than that of the man who had written at my table on that eventful night, and whom I had seen in the street at dawn. His forehead was lower, too, and more brutal in shape; nor did his eyes have the great dark rings about them that *that* had.

I took the message with as much composure as I could command. As I was counting the words, one of the other operators came in. I excused myself a moment, and went over to the operator. I told my co-worker, in as quiet and natural a voice as I could assume under my excitement, that the man was connected in some mysterious way with the great Whitechapel murder, and that he must be apprehended.

The man eyed us a little suspiciously for a moment, and, noticing that he observed us, we stopped talking. I came back to the counter. While I pretended to be getting the message ready for sending, my companion left the office in order to find a policeman.

I tried to gain time by engaging the man in conversation, but he did not seem inclined to talk. He started to move out, even before he had paid for the message, and I saw at once that it was his intention to escape. I stepped from behind the counter and approached him. I touched him on the arm and said, "Beg pardon, but are you not Mr. Atkins?" This was, of course, a mere pretext to detain him, and he saw through it at once. With an oath,

he turned upon me. His hand darted out like lightning and seized me by the throat.

"You scoundrel," he hissed between his teeth. "You are trying to catch me." His eyes glared like those of a demon. He pressed his thumb into the front of my neck until my windpipe was nearly wrenched from its position. I became unconscious.

When I "came to," I found myself in a

room in a hospital. I was told that I had been nearly murdered by the stranger, but that he had been captured just in time. In gaol the captive had confessed to being the perpetrator of the murder in the Whitechapel house. He was sentenced to death. Before his death, he confessed the details of the crime and its motive. It appeared that the man Anthony Usina had been invited to Louth by his (the murderer's) brother. That the prisoner and Usina had quarrelled over a sum of money owing from the murdered man to his murderer, and that they had actually had a fight, in which the murderer had received a severe beating at the

hands of Usina. The murderer had sworn revenge; and when, a few days after the fight, Usina had left for London, the man who had received the drubbing determined to follow him. The murderer's brother—an eminently respectable man in Louth—knowing the intentions and disposition of the murderer, had tried to argue with him, and keep him in Louth; but the murderer had eluded him and come up to London. He had also obtained Usina's address.



"HE SEIZED ME BY THE THROAT AND HISSED,
'YOU ARE TRYING TO CATCH ME.'"

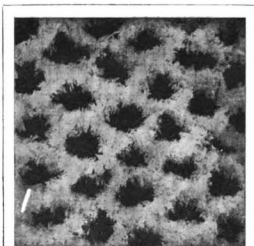
The brother of the murderer knew well that there would be trouble, and so soon as he learned that the intending murderer had gone to London, he wired the victim to be upon his guard, sending the message which I have shown you.

Strange to say, the sender of the message dropped dead from a stroke of apoplexy a few hours after he sent it. In the meantime, the murderer had found his victim and slain him in the manner described, mutilating him in order to escape identification. The murderer evidently did not know that his victim had received the message. It is strange that the victim did not prepare for the coming danger. Perhaps, however, he was taken by surprise.

Of course, had the murderer's brother been living, he might have brought the perpetrator of the crime to justice; though it is a question whether or not he would have cared to be instrumental in his own brother's apprehension. As it was, the apoplectic stroke was most timely for the purposes of the murderer, as it removed the only man who knew anything of the quarrel between the murderer and his victim.

The strangest fact of all was this: The murderer and his brother were twins, the resemblance being most striking. Now, while the man who died of apoplexy might not have given his brother up had he been alive, still, the prevention of the crime was the one thought upon his mind at the time

of his death, and the sending of the message was probably the last act of his life. It is a very strange thing that he should have thus proved the actual means of identification of the murderer; for, had I never seen the appearance, I would never have been able to identify the man. The man who came into the office that night was the image of the man whom I had seen writing at my table, and I would have sworn to his being the same person whom I had seen at dawn on the street a few hours afterwards.



REMARKABLE APPEARANCE OF FROST ON A WIRE FENCING.

Psychologists explain the apparition on the ground that the one thought in the mind of the man who died of apoplexy was to prevent his brother from committing the crime about which I have told you. This being the case, his spirit could not rest until it had induced me to hasten over to the East End and prevent the deed. This accounts for the very anxious expression I observed on the face of the man I saw

down in the street that morning.

However, all the ghost's anxiety was in vain.

I do not believe, as I said before, in all these ghost stories and the like, and I still maintain that a great deal of it comes from giving too free a play to one's imagination. I cannot, however, attempt to explain it all away; nor would I if I could. I can only tell you what has actually happened to me. I only know what I know.