

# FRIENDS THEY NEVER MEET

## ACQUAINTANCES MADE BY THE TELEGRAPH KEY.

CONFIDENCES EXCHANGED BETWEEN MEN WHO HAVE NEVER SEEN EACH OTHER—THEIR PECULIAR CONVERSATIONAL ABBREVIATIONS.

Telegraph operators form strong friendships over the wires. Metaphorically they shake hands cordially twice a day—when they begin work and when they end it. And when business is dull they hold long conversations, with hundreds of miles—perhaps thousands—separating them, as two friends might do over a dinner table. They tell of their hopes and fears and ambitions and impart very confidential information to men whom they have never seen. Of course, all these exchanges take place between those who have been in communication constantly for some time.

There are pairs of men who have been in daily communication with each other over the same telegraph wire for years, and who have never seen each other. Each is well acquainted with the other's temperament, his moods, his disposition, and his sentiments. Telegraph instruments and telegraph wires are unfeeling and stolid-looking things. Yet, through them a man is able to convey emotions of sorrow or joy almost as plainly as they may be expressed facially. The fact is perfectly palpable to the man at one end of the wire, while he is receiving dispatches, that the man who is sending them is ill or well, or—though the sender may make use of no terms of friendliness or of swear words—that he is in good temper or bad.

When the feeling between two operators in two cities, instead of being that of gentle affection, is that of strong dislike, the fact can be made just as apparent as though they were within a few feet of each other. No personal collision can occur, of course. That is one of the drawbacks. But a man can call names and make threats over a wire with almost the same facility as by word of mouth. One of the favorite resorts when two operators are quarreling is that professionally known as "fighting circuit." Not much is accomplished by this, however, for when two operators strive at the same time to call names over a wire, neither can succeed. Telegraphers have an old story about "fighting circuit." It is so very old, indeed, that it is doubtful if it is ever told nowadays. It is of one man who, for instance, was in Albany, and another who, for instance, was in Syracuse. After a successful exchange of complimentary remarks they began to "fight circuit," that is, they both tried to send epithets over the wire at once. They fought for some time. Neither would yield. The man at Albany, who was old and astute, saw that the man at Syracuse, who was young and stubborn, was in for an all-night struggle. The Albany man looked around for a proxy. He found it in the clock wire, which was a wire attached to the clock's pendulum, the swaying of which acted to open and close the circuit. He connected the Syracuse wire with the clock wire and went home to bed, leaving the Syracuse man valorously battling with the tick-tick, tick-tick of the clock. The old story concludes with the veracious statement that when the Albany man reached the office the next morning he heard the Syracuse man still fighting the clock, and that when the former disconnected the clock wire and closed the circuit the latter snapped out triumphantly, "I downed you at last, did I?"

"Fighting circuit" is probably the most annoying occupation there is. The very impotency, the very futility, of it is maddening. Here is a man who has offered a grievous insult. Yet the insultee cannot get at the insulter to kick him. They may be separated by thousands of miles—the practice of calling hard names is not infrequent, possibly, for that reason. "Fighting circuit" has several times driven men to the verge of frenzy. There is on record, in the archives of the Western Union office of this city, the tale of an excitable operator, who, after a long and unsuccessful struggle to say something mean to a man in Buffalo whom he hated, and who at the same time was trying to say something mean to him, suddenly rose from his chair and darted from the operating room down to the street. (This was in the old office at 145 Broadway.)

There he gazed wildly around, looking for some object on which to vent his anger. Near him a peaceable, mild-mannered gentleman was having his boots polished. The unhappy operator rushed at him, struck him in the face, and shouted, "Blank, blank you, you're always getting your boots blacked." But that was in the old days.

Not always, however, have differences arising over a wire been without a bloodless termination. It has been the case on a number of occasions that the insultee has boarded a train for the town of the insulter, and that upon the insulter being pointed out to him, the two have come together in an affray. But such instances are exceptions. Even though a man may board a train full of the thought of vengeance, it is likely to ooze out after a few hours' ride, and the visit, instead of being sanguinary, may be one of harmonious peace and good feeling. It may be stated positively that no quarrel begun over a telegraph wire has ever resulted fatally.

In their conversations telegraphers use a system of abbreviations which enables them to say considerably more in a certain period of time than they otherwise could. Their morning greeting to a friend in a distant city is usually "g. m." and the farewell for the evening, "g. n." the letters of course standing for good morning and good night. The salutation may be accompanied by an inquiry by one as to the health of the other, which would be expressed thus: "Hw r u ts mng?" And the answer would be: "I'm pty wl; hw r u?" or "I'm nt fig vy wl; fraid I've gt malaria."

By the time these courtesies have taken place some early messages have come from the receiving department or from some other wire, and the man before whom they are placed says to his friend many miles away: "Wl hrs a fu; Gol hang ts everlastin grind. I wish I w rich." And the other man says: "No rest fo t wick. Min pen." The last two words indicating that he wants the sender to wait a minute while he adjusts and tests his pen. Presently he clicks out "g a," meaning "go ahead," and the day's work has begun. If the sender is old in the business, he will take a steady, even gait, and the fact that the messages are piling up faster than he is getting rid of them won't worry him. When the pile gets too big he will notify the chief operator, and that important individual will probably take a portion of them away and have them sent by another wire. But, if the sender is young and ambitious, he will, as soon as the messages begin to accumulate, deem it his duty to "whoop 'em up," and unless the other man is ambitious, too, there will be trouble pretty quick.

The receiver will "break" a good deal, and directly he will observe, "Oh dt b in sch a bloomin hurry, u wont gt ur young raised tt way." And the sender, being young and "fresh," will reply to the effect that the receiver is a "ham" and will advise him to "get rif," which means that he ought to get up and let a competent receiver take his place. Then he will snap out the figure "4" prominently, which is the arbitrary sign standing for "Where shall I go ahead?" But although he may hurry and perspire, he won't send as many messages as the steady old fellow during the day.

No two operators send alike. The click of the instrument is always the same to the ear of a man who does not understand it, but one operator recognizes the sending of another if he has ever heard it before for any length of time, just as a familiar face is recognized. Operator "Tommy" Snaggs leaves New York, and, after roaming from one city to another, finally lands in the Galveston (Texas) office and goes to work. He is put down to work a wire running to Kansas City. The man in Kansas City begins to send. Mr. Snaggs picks up his ears and interrupts the sender. "Ain't tt u Billy Robinson?" he asks, and the other man says, "Yes, its me, & ur ole Tommy Snaggs." Mr. Snaggs returns, "tt wle I am, I thot I reconized ur sendin'." Then they devote a few moments to telling of their travels. The last time they worked on the same wire one was in Boston and the other in Montreal.

It is a peculiar fact also that an experienced operator can almost invariably distinguish a woman's sending from a man's. There is nearly always some peculiarity about a woman's style of transmission. It is not necessarily a fault. Many women send very clearly and make their dots and dashes precisely as they were intended to be made. It is impossible to describe the peculiarity, but there is no doubt of its existence. Nearly all women have a habit of rattling off a lot of meaningless dots before they say anything. But some men do that, too. A woman's touch is lighter than a man's, and her dots and dashes will not carry so well on a very long circuit. That is presumably the reason why in all large offices the women are usually assigned to work the wires running to various parts of the cities.

Operators laugh over a wire, or rather, they convey the fact that they are amused. They do this by telegraphing "ha, ha." Very great amusement is indicated by sending "ha" slowly and repeating it several times, and a smile is expressed by sending "ha" once or perhaps twice. Transmitting it slowly and repeating it tells the perpetrator of the joke at the other end of the wire that the listener is leaning back in his chair and laughing long and heartily.

Twenty or twenty-five years have made great changes for the telegraphers. In the old days an operator was an individual to whom a great interest was attached, and around whom was a halo of mystery. Then he received a salary which was deemed handsome for what was apparently such light work. In a boarding house he was always the star. Railroad passes were obtainable by him for the asking. He was frequently given the freedom of cities, and when it was not given to him he sometimes took it. But now—well, the old-timers assert that the business has gone to the dogs. One drawback has been pointed to, as preventing their advancement in the fact that they are so very claunish. Their working hours are, of course, spent in the company of other operators, but so are their leisure hours. They do not seem to care to circulate among people of other businesses. This, of course, is not the case with all of them, but it is with a very great number. The consequence is that many know practically nothing of matters or people outside of the telegraph class.

This handicap works to prevent them from realizing a desire which sooner or later en-

ters the heart of every telegrapher—to get into some business where there is a possibility of advancement. But when he looks over the field—if he gets beyond the mere yearning—he sees that he will have to accept a much smaller income than he is already receiving, and that settles it. He continues to yearn, but he takes no action. He finally becomes like a man who has been long in the Government service. He stays in a rut. In the telegraph business the comfortable berths are for the very few. That condition obtains more there than in any other business.

## REAL ESTATE BUYERS WAITING.

### CHANCES ON WHICH THE MARKET MAY BOOM OR DROOP.

Although there have yet been no offers of real estate within the city limits at prices denoting concessions from the market values of last Spring, buyers are as firm as ever in resisting those prices, and the last week's business was light on this account, as well from the fact that a holiday interfered with activity. It is likely to be a question for some time whether the real estate market will be able to withstand the effects of the stringency that has depreciated values in other forms of investments. It may be said in favor of the present plane of prices that owners seem fully convinced that real estate in this city will never suffer materially, whatever woes may betide other forms of investment. Since there must always be two sides in a transaction, however, buyers feel that they will have no better time than this in which to assert their demands for concessions from the very high figures that have for some time ruled the market. If the market can withstand such demands it will have been strong indeed.

In a contest of this kind it is not forgotten that those who are in the market to buy are there in the hope of becoming owners, and that the greater the firmness displayed by owners the better fortified will be the position of buyers whenever they may acquire title to the property they covet. In that view of the matter a firm market pleases everybody. It can only be expected that if owners shall begin to concede a lower scale of prices, such concession can but be the beginning of further and more urgent demands in that direction, and, once started on such a course, there will be no telling where the market may end. Therefore, although inactivity now blights the market, if owners shall be able to hold out until Spring there shall be little fear that real estate in this city will have any more serious setback than is implied in a suspension of active business for a few months at a time when other kinds of value are thrown overboard at wholesale regardless of sacrifice.

The low prices of stocks still act unfavorably upon the real estate market. If investors could only believe that the hurry was over in the stock market, there would no doubt be a diversion of capital in that direction which would drive the real estate market into a state of absolute dullness. It happens that those who have money to invest, and who mean to put it out to the best advantage by outright purchases in whatever they buy, but who, nevertheless, buy with a view of quick profit, feel by no means confident that stocks are to move steadily upward. In place of confidence there is widespread distrust and suspicion and fear lest the dump which stocks suffered early in the present month may be repeated, and that capital now invested at present prices may therefore be liable to depreciation in the near future.

While it is recognized that railroad and similar securities are low, it is believed that the chances are quite even that they may become lower, and that investors in them at the present time may have reason to regret their haste. This fear of further and serious depreciation in stock serves to lock up a great deal of capital which, in markets normal alike for stocks and for real estate, would naturally be lodged in real estate. Note has already been made in this column of the diversion of much investment capital into stocks a fortnight ago, but the amounts then invested are believed to be small in comparison with the amounts awaiting investment in the best available form of securities.

Prediction in such a matter is at best hazardous, but it may probably be safely said that if the stock market shall continue to advance at anything like the pace at which it has advanced within the past week or two the money now held for investment will naturally drift to real estate rather than stocks, and that the drooping real estate market will then be revived.

For the present the activity in the market is represented by the class of speculators who buy for the purpose of turning over their purchases to builders at an advance, and by a few dealers in suburban property who are taking in small profits on low-priced purchases made this season. Ordinarily, purchases for builders are guided almost entirely by individual judgment upon the chances of a speedy disposal to builders. At present they are restricted to the certainty of transfers of this kind. Unless the speculator knows just where he can place property he will not buy it. This necessitates something more than an exercise of an ordinary business judgment, for it implies dealing with builders in advance of purchases and naturally contracts the market and lessens the demand for speculative property. There are reports of negotiations which have been broken off during the last week or two because of a suspected disposition of certain builders to withdraw offers made by them to speculators for property which was under advisement.

In regard to improved property, the market is confined mainly to permanent investors. There is no speculation in that kind of property at this time. Sales of improved property at auction have turned out fairly well, but the prices paid will serve as a fair indication of the opinion of buyers, who think that owners have been endeavoring to maintain a fictitious plane of values for several months back. If some of the prices which are now bid at auction had been paid for property early in the Fall, every one would have recognized such prices as actual bargains. That they are no longer so recognized, but rather pass as a matter of course, shows that the real estate district has become accustomed to lower prices than have prevailed, and that if an actual shrinkage of values shall occur it will have been foreshadowed by sales in the auction room.

There will be a sale at auction on the Exchange this week which will serve about as well as any sale lately made as a test of the market for the best kind of property. The estate of Leopold Friedman is to be closed and settled by the sale of the six-story apartment house known as the Jeannette, at the northeast corner of Seventy-second Street and Ninth Avenue. The property occupies a frontage of 50 feet on Seventy-second Street and is 100 feet deep. It is well rented and in good condition and the neighborhood is unexceptionable. The sale of a piece of property on the northwest corner of Seventy-second Street and Ninth Avenue of the same land dimensions, but having a building one story less in height, brought \$180,000 not long ago. The value of the land on which the Jeannette stands is estimated at \$150,000 and the house itself is in all respects first-class.

This sale will give buyers an opportunity to express their real opinions of west side property desirably located and well improved. It will furnish, perhaps, the first conclusive test of the actual condition of the market since the financial stringency began. There seems to be no doubt that the property will bring a large figure, and those who are devoting themselves to maintaining firm prices for the west side section are confident that it will yield almost as much money as could be expected at private sale. Whatever price the property may bring, the sale will be instructive and valuable as a guide to investors, and will be important in showing the very large advances in west side property consequent upon the extension of the elevated road into that section. The land on which the Jeannette stands, together with two abutting lots on Seventy-third Street, cost its present owners \$22,000 in 1879. This was at a time of great depression in the real estate market, but from the figures of estimates given above, it will be seen that in ten years the value of the land alone has increased seven-fold.

Property owners are taking some interest in the announcement of the proposed New-York and New-Jersey Bridge that a union station for the arrival and departure of trains in all directions will be built in Twenty-fifth and Bridge on Broadway, between Twenty-fifth and Forty-fourth Streets. There is no great alarm yet, because inquiry has developed that the projectors of this enterprise have provided themselves up to date with a capital of only \$300,000, of which but \$30,000 has been paid in. In view of the fact that strange things happen in this city, however, and that property owners have already had a costly experience by reason of the construction of a railroad station above ground in the heart of the city, it may be inferred that no union station will be built on Broadway, except after a protracted and energetic contest in the courts. Property on the side streets north of Forty-second Street suffered a depreciation averaging quite 50 per cent. by the construction of the Grand Central Station. It will not be denied that public convenience has been served by having a railroad station at Forty-second Street, but evidence is abundant that property owners had to pay so heavily for this undertaking by way of depreciation in values east of Lexington Avenue that the public service was furnished at considerable individual loss.

The strip of the city that would suffer by the construction of a railroad station on Broadway may perhaps not be quite as extensive as that which was affected by the Grand Central Station, but it can hardly be less valuable, especially in view of the ramification of tracks from such a station. If it shall happen that the bridge enterprise shall be pushed forward to the stage of condemnation or otherwise acquiring property on Broadway, there can be little doubt that an opposition will be encountered which will be sustained by almost unlimited capital and will be pushed to the full legal limit.

The election at the Real Estate Exchange will occur to-morrow. Each side has made its fight, and just now there is a calm before the battle. It seems to be the impression in the real estate district that stock will be voted about as it was for several years until a year ago. Formerly the auctioneers were able to elect five of the thirteen Directors. They drummed up enough extra proxies last year to elect an additional Director. The criticisms upon their management of the Exchange seemed to have alienated some of their new friends, and it is thought that they cannot hold last year's gains. They have enough stock to elect five Directors.