

A Telephone Romance

I.

It really had reached a crisis. I don't remember anything like it in the whole course of my life. True when I was at Harrow I went through a term of great suspense, consequent upon the captain's delay in filling the eleventh place in the team, but that really can't compare with what I have experienced lately.

Her name—the crisis—is Irene, and her father is Sir Stuart Crowther.

In view of the crisis, therefore, I decided to go and see Jack Collier. Jack was at Harrow with me, and now practises law in the Inner Temple; so I sallied forth.

I say sallied, but, as a matter of fact, I took a hansom, as being more practicable. Once settled therein, I leaned back, lit a cigarette, and began to think out my plan of campaign.

"Collier," I reflected, as my cab—the last link in a wretched chain that stretched from Trafalgar Square to Exeter Hall—crawled slowly eastward, "is a man of the law. What he wants is a lucid statement of my case. The clearer the statement the easier will it be for him to weigh the matter, and pronounce a judicial, well-balanced opinion. Rhapsodies will simply confuse the issue, as they say in the House.

"When I get to the Temple I shall greet Collier quietly. He will at once see, from the gravity of my manner, that there is something up, and will lean back in his chair and give me his whole attention. Then I shall unfold my points one by one, and, finally, he will give me the best advice in his most lucid style. On that advice my further action in the matter, as the War Office says, will depend."

I say this is the kind of interview I anticipated, and fully intended to have, with Collier. As a matter of fact, his whole behavior was disappointing. His face did not at once become grave on seeing my serious demeanour; on the contrary, he laughed, as soon as he saw me, and, with scarcely a greeting, asked me if I was "in it again."

"In what?" I said, rather lamely, I fear.

"In the paternal hot water," he replied, alluding, I imagine, to some buried controversy between myself and Lord Bravington.

"I have reached a crisis," I said, with dignity, "and have come to consult you as one man of the world would consult another on the best way of—"

"What, not the old man this time? Who is she then?"

I stated my case with considerable eloquence, I fancy.

"And the most wonderful thing about her," I concluded, a little out of breath after a quarter of an hour's talking, "is the way she enters into all my interests. Her opinions, her ideals, her tastes are mine. The more we see of each other, the more we find that our outlook on life is the same. Ours is a union of hearts and souls. It's—"

Collier started; I started. The calm of his room was broken by a strident clanging, which appeared to come from a corner near the fireplace.

"It's only my telephone," said Collier, laughing at my alarm.

"You never told me you had one!" I said indignantly.

To have my peroration spoiled by a self-asserting telephone-bell, the very existence of which I had been unaware, was disconcerting.

"It's only just been laid on," he explained, speaking of the thing as if it were the water supply or a fresh coat of paint. "You can hold on, too, if you like. My telephone's got a double receiver."

He led me across to the instrument of torture. It was one of those to which a kindly company provides two receivers, one for each ear. You can really hear quite well by listening at one, so that two persons can listen to the same speaker at the other end by holding one receiver each.

"Are you there?" sang out Collier, applying one receiver to his ear, while I gripped the other.

"Is that Mr. Collier?" replied a far-away voice evasively.

"It is. Who are you?" said Collier, still interrogatively.

"I am Goodwright," said the voice.

"Oh!" said Collier, surprised.

"Oh!" I very nearly said, being reminded just in time, by a frown from Collier, that, telephonically speaking, I did not exist.

Goodwright was a mutual friend of ours, and one of our set. It was not likely that he would have anything to say to Collier that was not for me to hear, so I continued to listen. I mention this in my own defence, because the family motto is "Koneste et recte."

"I wanted to speak to you very particularly," continued Goodwright, "and I couldn't manage to come and see you, so I had to try this way. It's very private, though. You're sure you haven't got a client there?"

"Not a sign of one," Collier truthfully replied.

"That's all right, because it's not professional. As I said before, it's very personal. You have never proposed to a girl in your life, have

you?" queties the voice of Goodwright anxiously.

"My experiences in that direction" replied Collier, evading the question, "are not extensive."

"Well, but have you ever been on the point of it?"

"I don't like these inquiries," complained the man of the law. "I am a man more questioning than questioned, as a rule, and changing roles don't suit me. I think it's my turn now. You want to know whether I have ever proposed, and how I did it, so that you may profit by my experience? That's pretty well the brief I am to advise on, isn't it?"

"Well, it might be," said Goodwright grudgingly.

"Very well, then; now for a few questions to be asked by counsel to clear up doubtful points. Number one, who is she?"

"You do take the wind out of a chap's sails!" grumbled Goodwright. "Well, it's Irene Crowther."

Something seemed the matter with Collier's room. The ceiling whirled round in an alarming manner, the carpet appeared to be chasing the ceiling, the hum of traffic in the street below stopped suddenly. The telephone receiver, without any warning, fell out of my hand. I sat down very suddenly in a handy chair, and waited for the room to become still again. Collier's voice, miles away now, went on monotonously. Somewhere in a mist I could see him looking at me—rather anxiously, I thought.

By degrees the things in the room consented to settle down again, and the stupid buzzing in my head became fainter. Mechanically I got up, and, in spite of Collier's attempts to wave me off, resumed my hold of the receiver.

"Well, I shall weary you if go on any longer singing her praises," Goodwright's voice was saying; "but I wanted you to know before anyone else what a lucky chap I am going to be!"

"Pretty confident, aren't you?" I heard Collier reply.

"I feel confident, old chap. I don't say so because of any particular attractions I may possess, you know; but, you see, our tastes and aspirations fit in so wonderfully. The more we see of each other, the more I feel that we were simply made for each other. It's a union of souls, if ever there was one!"

II.

Never did the light penetrate darkness quicker than Goodwright's words clear my befogged brain. That this card-playing, race-going, Bond Street walking idiot should use my very phrases, share my innermost thoughts! A union of souls between Irene and him! The idea was sacrilegious.

Down went the receiver. I dashed for my gloves and hat, with one idea in my head, and in another second I should have gone, when Collier closed the conversation on the telephone rather hurriedly, and came towards me.

"I am sorry, old chap! I would never have let you listen if I had known; but I never dreamt of this. Feeling better now?"

"I'm all right," I said, buttoning my coat. "I am going straight to her."

"He's going to speak to her to-night at the Penfolds' dance," said Collier commiseratingly.

It struck me that he looked decidedly troubled—unnecessarily so, I thought. Collier generally sees only the humorous side of any trouble of mine, but his face now expressed nothing but sympathy for a lost cause. It was very damping.

"I'm not going out to order my coffin, man," I reminded him; "although, to look at you, that's all you appear to think I'm fit for."

"Oh, you are looking all right!" he replied feebly. "But—"

"To-night," I said, interrupting him, as I stood with my hand on the door, "there are going to be proposals of two ordinary men to the girl best worth proposing to in the world. If one of 'em is rejected, he will congratulate the other like a man, go home, write a few letters, make a few arrangements, and start on the quest of forgetfulness from Charing Cross to-morrow morning. On second thoughts, I can't do anything this morning, so the only pressing problem is how to get through the intervening hours between now and to-night."

I ran down the steps, and called a cab, Collier still watching me with the same troubled look on his face. I wasn't sorry when my hansom had carried me out into Fleet Street, and the face of Irene, inviting, replaced the visage of Collier, foreboding.

III.

Casting about for the best way of killing time, I decided to spend the afternoon at the club. I lunched there, and strolled into the smoking-room afterwards. In one of the corners there was a figure obscured by a newspaper. Every few minutes one of the hands that held the paper disappeared, and a head bent down for a second and jerked up again, and a little snap followed. It was Goodwright, pretending to read the paper, and looking at his watch every few minutes. He nodded when he saw me, talked at random for a few minutes, and then buried himself in the paper again.

"Doesn't look particularly sanguine," I thought. "Very creditable to his powers of discrimination."

I called for a paper, and began reading it steadily through, including even the weather forecast and the City news.

A soft step sounded at my side, and a deferential waiter stood by me.

"A gentleman has rung up on the telephone, sir," he said apologetically, as if it was his fault.

"Who does he want?" I asked, for the waiter's glance was a comprehensive one, and seemed to take in both of us.

"He asked for both of you, sir. He rang up, said he supposed both Mr. Goodwright and Mr. Hansell were at the club, and could he speak to them on the telephone. Mr. Collier is the gentleman's name, sir."

"What on earth does he mean?" He can't speak to both of us at once," said Goodwright. "The waiter must have made a mistake. He wanted either you or me, whichever happened to be in. I'll go down if you like."

He dropped his paper, and went away.

I accepted Goodwright's explanation, and began reading again, but in a little more than a minute the waiter was back again.

"The gentleman wants to speak to you as well, sir," he said, with a note of triumph in his tone. "The telephone has a double receiver."

I dropped my paper on the floor, where it joined Goodwright's, forming a little heap, and followed the waiter to the telephone.

Goodwright was standing with one receiver to his ear, tapping his foot impatiently on the floor, and holding out the other receiver for me to take.

"Here you are," he said. "It's Collier, and, for some unearthly reason, he wants to speak to both of us at the same time. Why he can't repeat his message I don't know!"

I grasped my receiver, and listened. The slight, rustling sound that came through the wire told me that Collier was at the telephone at his end, and was whispering to someone standing by.

The situation was getting on my nerves. After all, Collier could not have any bad news for either of us. It was only his way of inviting us to a bachelor-dinner. I came a little nearer to the machine, and shouted "Hallo, there!" while Goodwright, fired by my example, did the same.

"Oh, yes! Ah, are you there?" was Collier's reply.

Even over the telephone I could tell that his voice was nervous and jerky.

"Now, I do hope you two chaps won't take it badly," began Collier's voice; "but I've got something to tell you that you won't much care to hear. It concerns you both, so I wanted to tell you together. You both of you did me the honor of making a confidant of me this morning."

I felt Goodwright looked at me accusingly, as if I had appropriated a special privilege of his.

"It was about Miss Crowther" the voice went on.

Accusation left the face of Goodwright in a hurry. Rage and contempt had a keen struggle for the vacant place, and the battle was drawn.

"Well, after you left, Hansell, I thought over things, and then went up to Queen's Gate and saw her."

"As advocate for both sides?" Goodwright queried sarcastically.

"The fact is," Collier went on nervously, ignoring the interruption, "Miss Crowther and I have been engaged for some weeks, but we weren't intending to announce it just yet."

The hesitating voice ceased suddenly, after a few minutes; there was a sound of whispering at the other end, and then another voice spoke.

"Jack forgot to tell you," it said, "but we want you to be the very first to congratulate us to-night, and you are both to come early. I shall break it off with Jack if you don't. Promise me."

And we did.—London Answers.

PERSONALLY CONDUCTED TOUR

To California and Lewis and Clarke Exposition, Portland, Oregon.

A personally conducted excursion to the Pacific coast via the Grand Trunk Railway System and connecting lines leaves Quebec July 5, and Montreal and Toronto July 6. The route will be via Chicago, thence through Council Bluffs to Omaha, Denver and Colorado Springs. Stops will be made at each of these places and side trips taken to Manitou, Cripple Creek, Garden of the Gods, etc. From there the party will continue through the famous scenic route of the Denver and Rio Grande, through the Royal Gorge to Salt Lake City, thence to Los Angeles, San Francisco, Mt. Shasta, Portland, Oregon, Seattle, Spokane, and home through St. Paul and Minneapolis. The trip will occupy about thirty days, ten days being spent on the Pacific coast.

The price for the round trip, including railroad fare, Pullman tourist sleeping cars, all meals in the dining car, hotels, side trips, etc., is \$165.50 from Quebec, or \$160.50 from Montreal and \$150.00 from Toronto. This first trip is designed as a vacation trip for teachers, although many who are not teachers will improve the opportunity of taking the trip at the remarkably low price afforded.

For full particulars address E. C. Bowler, General Agent and Conductor, Room 308, Union Station, Toronto.

The torch of truth wanes dim when the winds of opposition die.

A WOMAN'S WIT.

How She Saved Twenty Thousand Dollars From Robbers.

A good illustration of the quick wit of a woman appears in the following incident of the old coaching days of the far West. The man of the tale does not show off in the best of lights, and did not deserve his reward. The coach was on its way over a lonely road, and carried among its passengers a lady going to join her husband and a man travelling by himself.

"I have one thousand dollars in my pocketbook," confided the lone traveller to the lady, "and I feel very uneasy. Would you mind concealing it in your dress? If we are held up they are less likely to search you."

The lady consented, and hid the roll of bills. Toward evening the shout of "Throw up your hands!" brought the coach to a standstill, and four men, masked and on horseback, demanded, at the point of the pistol, that all money should be immediately given up. The lone traveller passed over all his remaining cash, consisting of a few dollars, and was congratulating himself on his escape when, to his horror, he heard the lady say:

"I have a thousand dollars here, but I suppose I must give them up," and without further hesitation she handed over the precious pile of bank bills.

The robbers rode off in high good humor, but as soon as they were gone the traveller let loose his wrath. He abused the lady in no measured terms, and hardly stopped short of calling her a coward. The accused said little, but when the end of the journey was reached, she invited the angry man to her house.

"I shall have to accept," he said sulkily. "I haven't a cent in the world through your stupidity."

As he was dressing for dinner that night his host came to his room.

"Here are the thousand dollars," he said, "which my wife ventured to borrow. You see, she had twenty thousand dollars hid in her gown, and she thought if she gave up your thousand it would save further search. Thank you for the loan, which saved me a heavy loss."

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A GYPSY TRICK.

How They Disposed of a Broken-winded Horse.

It is presumed that a day or so before there could have been found in a gypsy camp not far away a broken-winded and weather-beaten plug of a horse worth perhaps six pounds in open market, says an English writer in *Outing*. Then began such a grooming, clipping, polishing and doctoring as must rank among the fine arts. Mane and tail were miracles of braiding, intertwined with fresh straw and fetchingly beribboned. Into the crowded village was led a mettlesome and shining steed, carefully escorted, too valuable, forsooth, to be put up for sale. After the horse was tied near a popular public house, three or four rustics strolled up to the owner of the beast who looked to be all "hayseed."

They looked the "bargain" over, shook their heads in disappointment that no dickering was possible, and drifted into the taproom of the "pub." Presently other farmers tricked up their cars and wanted to see the horse. And so it went on until the cleverly disguised gypsies who made up the original bunch of "rustics" had created a strong undercurrent of interest setting toward the transformed "plug."

The first show of cash came from among those masquerading farmers, whose identity lurked only in the midnight eye and shifty glance with the true gypsy slant in the corner of it. And after hours of palaver, over many mugs of beer, it was one of these "made-up" Hodges who closed the deal, bought the horse and paid for it in ostentatious sovereigns. The genuine farmer, for whom the bait was cast, could not withstand this evidence of a "rare bargain," and was the more eager now that it had slipped out of his grasp. Therefore it was not long before the "fake" buyer was offered a bonus of one pound to let go of his purchase, held out for two pounds, and got it, and vanished as if on wings.

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A NEW COAL-CUTTER.

English miners are interested in a new compressed-air coal-cutter recently introduced by a Sheffield firm. The machine weighs only 150 pounds, and it is said that it can be used in seams so steep that the miner cannot stand upright, and so thin that he has to crawl on hands and knees. A piston carrying a pick, and governed by a valve movement, flashes to and fro with great speed, the point of the pick being gradually moved across the coal by means of a lever so that a continuous cut is made.

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THE SPOILS OF WAR.

The following animals and birds taken by our army from the Russians at the front arrived at Shimabashi, says the *Tokio Times*, and were at once presented to the imperial family. To the Emperor, two Manchurian horses, one rabbit, one dog, one hawk and one quail; to the crown prince and his sons, two donkeys and two dogs.

BRITAIN IS QUITE SAFE

BALFOUR SPEAKS OF NATION'S DEFENSIVE POWER.

Courage and Foresight Needed to Protect Possessions in the East.

Premier Balfour made a remarkable speech recently in the British House of Commons with reference to the work of the committee on national defence. With an openness seldom surpassed, he discussed the preparations which have been taken for defence of the coasts and the possibilities in case of invasion.

"Assuming that our army was over seas and our organized fleets away from home," he said, "our military advisers, including Lord Roberts, think it would not be possible to attempt an invasion of this country with fewer than 70,000 men. Lord Roberts thought an attempt to take London with even 70,000 would be folly.

"With the fleet absent and the army away could 70,000 men be landed on these shores? Since the days of Wellington and Nelson great changes, all in favor of the defense, have taken place. We have railroads and wireless telegraphy, torpedo-boats and submarines. No admiral would view with serenity the disembarkation of 70,000 men on a coast defended by torpedo-boats and submarines.

"Let the committee consider, then, whether it would be possible to land 70,000 troops on this island.

"Suppose France wished to invade our shores. It is estimated that ships of 250,000 tonnage would be required to transport 70,000 men. It is no simple matter to collect that many transports. The nearest French harbor is Cherbourg, a bad harbor. Meanwhile, from the Faroe Islands to Gibraltar we should be collecting cruisers, destroyers and submarines.

IMPOSSIBLE TALK.

"When the French fleet arrived the disembarkation of 70,000 men would not be easy if our fleet was off the coast between Dover and Portsmouth. It would require 48 hours of fine weather.

"How could the helpless transports escape our torpedo-boats leaving out of consideration our cruisers and torpedo-boats. The thing is impossible. It is not an enterprise a sane nation would undertake. No admiral in the British fleet would attempt a like task."

The premier added that submarine mines were not much thought of by the committee as a means of defense. This did not refer to blockade mines. He believed civilized countries would check the sowing of mines in the waters of the world.

Mr. Balfour said that as to colonial defence and having regard to the conditions in the sea power of other nations, the redistribution of the fleet and army was desirable. The committee consequently proceeded on the broad line that the British fleet and army should be available for the defence of the empire in all parts of the world and should, as far as possible, be concentrated at the centre of the empire from which it could be distributed as necessity arose. The committee had come to the conclusion that Jamaica and Trinidad should be centres of great naval operations.

COURAGE IS NEEDED.

Regarding India, the progress of Russia toward the Afghan frontier and the construction of strategic railways had compelled the government to consider in all seriousness what could be done by our great military neighbors in the East. No surprise or rush, however, was possible.

In an invasion of India any collision of great magnitude between two powers must depend upon rapidity of railway construction. Russia would be faced with almost insuperable difficulties. If Britain permitted the slow absorption of Afghanistan and allowed Russia's strategic railways to creep closer and closer to a frontier which Britain is bound to defend, then, this country would not only inevitably have to pay for its supineness by having to keep afoot an army far larger than could be contemplated with equanimity, but would sooner or later be faced with some of the greatest military problems which had ever confronted the British Government. Foresight and courage were the great needs.

A GOOD SHOT.

An officer, while his regiment was stationed at Cawnpore, was for some time in the hospital recovering from a long illness, and by the doctor's orders was only allowed to eat dainties.

One day, therefore, his chum went out to shoot a few water-fowl for him. He had no sport, however, but, not to disappoint his friend, he sent his native servant to the bazaar in the town to purchase a few birds, and to take them to the invalid, at the same time sending a note to the effect that he had managed to kill "the birds herewith."

Next morning he received a letter thanking him for the kind present and saying, "the fowls are excellent specimens, and are now walking about the garden."

The native servant had taken live birds to the hospital.