

MORSE.

The Romance of the Invention of the Telegraph.

It was Worked Out by a Poor Portrait Painter.

How Idiotic Statesmen Giggled Over It.

George Alfred Townsend contributes to The Cincinnati Enquirer an interview with a son of a friend of Morse, the inventor of the telegraph. Morse's profession was that of a portrait painter, and he suffered most of the time from abject poverty.

"Well," said I, "it is a little queer that a poor, struggling painter should make the telegraph, and forty years afterward a poor newboy make the greatest improvement upon it the present century, and invent the telephone and the electric light."

"To continue," said my friend, "it was on the packet ship sailing home from Europe in 1832 that Morse leaped to the idea of the telegraph. He said that it came to him at the dinner table, and took possession of his mind as pervasively as if he had received an electric shock. He became so much exercised from a thought that he had incidentally expressed that he went on deck in mid-ocean. Lightning and electricity had long been known as one and the same, but Morse's idea was that he would transmit intelligence and record it at a distance. It is said that he had remarked at the table a few minutes before: 'If the presence of electricity could be visible in any part of the circuit, I think there is no reason why intelligence cannot be transmitted instantaneously by electricity.' He made up his mind to apply himself to that thing."

"How old was he then?" "Forty-one. He saw the main point of his discovery in the hour he thought it over. He saw the current interrupted and the spark appearing. Said he: 'The spark shall be one sign, its absence another, the time of its absence another sign. Here will be three signs which are enough to make the alphabet.'"

"Morse then sat down on this ship Sully and began to make marks to represent letters and figures to be produced by electricity at a distance from the place of action. His mind was literally on fire, and he could not sleep that night. Several almost sleepless nights followed as he lay in his berth and thought it over, and then, at the breakfast-table on the ship, he explained the process and exhibited the drawing of an instrument to do the work. Five years afterward when he constructed the model of the instrument, his fellow passengers identified it as the same he traced to the captain one day, saying: 'Should you hear of the telegraph one of these days as the wonder of the world, remember that the discovery was made on board the good ship Sully.'"

"Now tell me," said I to my electrical friend, "how old was electricity in that year 1832?" "Well, galvanism began in 1780. The Leyden jar to store up electricity was made about 1750. A man named Stephen Gray, in 1729, discovered that electricity could be conducted through metallic wires. Experiments were made with wires as a conductor in Germany and Paris before 1750. Franklin fired gunpowder and spirits with the electric force through great lengths of wire. An electric telegraph to transmit messages was first suggested by a newspaper writer in 1753, and his article can still be read: this was a Scotchman. Just before our revolutionary war a Frenchman, at Geneva, proposed a telegraph with one wire for each letter in the alphabet. The use of sparks was suggested ninety years ago. It was during the wars with Napoleon that Ralph Wedgwood proposed a telegraph to bring the war news to London. Lord Castlereagh, who finally replied that the war was at an end, and that the old system was sufficient for the country. In 1816 there was an English telegraph eight miles long, which operated with little balls on clock dials. But electricity was not sufficient. Galvanism, or Voltaism, was requisite to come in, and the Voltaic pile was discovered in 1800. Then the magnet was brought in, and Professor Joseph Henry, in America, made the galvanometer. A great many little things were done, and in 1825, five years before Morse's great suggestion, the horseshoe magnet was invented in London. Faraday, while working on the ocean at that time, discovered magneto-electricity. The word 'telegraph' means 'writing at a distance,' and all early telegraphs were mere signal beacons."

"Well, how much did Morse know about all these things when he jumped to his conclusion?" "He knew very little. He knew a soft, iron horse shoe-shaped bar of iron could be passed magnetically while a current was running through the wires around it, and that electricity had been transmitted by Franklin and others, and that by means of a battery and electro-magnets, reciprocal motion could be produced. His great suggestion was that the battery current could be made through the electro-magnet to produce physical effects at a distance. He asked himself: 'How can I make use of the simple up and down motion of opening and closing a circuit to write an intelligible message at one end of the wire, and at the same time print it at the other?'"

"Well, what was the genius of his invention?" "Why, to get something that would give the word of thirty-six letters and figures from a pencil that merely moved up and down, making a dot, or a line, or a blank, as a strip of paper was drawn under it. Three elements, dots, lines and spaces were to make groups that should stand for these thirty-six letters and figures. In short, Morse's invention was the alphabet. It was a mechanic's invention rather than a scientific man's."

"Did he have any immediate luck?" "No, he had no money for at least six years. His brothers met him at the ship's dock in New York, and walking up the street he told them that he had made a great invention. They could not get him to talk about it. Far away he had a letter from a new thing. He went to his brother Richard's house, who edited the religious paper and lived there for months. He died, he had a twelve years' fight and could not pursue his art with that enthusiasm and excitement so necessary while the motherless children, had spent all his money in Europe, and between his passion for the telegraph and his desperate means, it was feared that he might drop into melancholy and even insanity. He kept brooding on the telegraph while going from place to place to paint portraits. His brothers published their religious paper at the corner of Nassau and Beekman streets, and on that spot now stands the magnificent Morse building of brick, constructed from telegraph profits. Morse's shop stood on that spot, and under one little window he had his cot, and lathe, and tools, and drank tea and ate crackers. He dressed like a workman. He applied to congress for a commission to paint one of the panels in the capitol to keep him from starving, but John Quincy Adams, who belonged to the free trade school of art critics, wanted foreign artists also to compete. Fenimore Cooper replied to Adams in a very severe article, and Morse was considered to be the author, and his name was, therefore, rejected by the congressional committee as a punishment, although he had nothing whatever to do with the criticism. Yet this insult and slight really let his whole mind loose on the telegraph. He succeeded in spite of respectable snobbery."

"Well, what did he next do?" "He took a room in the University building, on Washington square, New York, and continued his experiments. Still so poor that he had to buy his food at a neighboring grocery and cook it himself, he concealed from his friends his physical misery and went out at night to buy his meat and tea, and carry it home unseen. That was my mode of life for

many years," he said; "that room of the university was the birth-place of the recording telegraph. There he discovered the relay, or a means by which the current which, through distance, becomes feeble, could be renewed. He went in 1836 to see the little telegraph in operation about a mile of wire suspended in successive turns about the walls, a small battery in one corner of the room, a sort of clock-work, 'click, click, click.' He turned on Hamilton Fish at Washington, in 1844, and told him he would live to witness telegraph communication between Europe and America."

"As early as 1843 he projected the extension of telegraph wires under water. "The year 1836 was the darkest and longest of his life. He was giving lessons to his pupils in the art of painting, while his mind was in the agony of a great invention. The telegraph was then done, and was shown to different visitors—how it could read off words from a slip of paper which they silently gave at the other end. Among these visitors was Alfred Vail, who was thirty years of age. He was the first bold man, though a young one, to say, 'I will put my money into this invention.'"

"He was a young man from New Jersey, of a family that made iron and brass. The young man said: 'My people can make the brass instruments for Morse's invention.' He got from his people money for Morse, and set himself to work to perfect the working instruments. Morse assigned him one-fourth interest in the patent right."

"Well, how did the government take hold of this thing?" "Levi Woodbury, the secretary of the treasury, issued a circular asking for information about the different kinds of telegraphing, and sent a copy of this and told Woodbury that he would demonstrate very soon at Washington the plans of a method superior to any that was projected. He filed in the patent office a petition late in September, 1837, Van Buren being president."

"It is a singular fact that at that early period speculators in stocks, who now make such a use of the wires, came to Morse and wanted to buy the monopoly of his invention for a private line. "Some trouble was experienced in getting the wire manufactured. In 1837 messages were going through ten miles of wire. Prof. M. D. Gale was taken into the partnership. The three worked together in an old cotton factory at the iron works near Morristown, N. J. Young Alfred Vail made the magnet and the first section, and a long description of it was published in 'The Morristown Journal.'"

"What was the next thing?" "Why Morse gave an exhibition at the University of Washington square, New York. The first sentence sent through was by General Thos. S. Cummings, and was in these words: 'Attention the Universe! By Kingdoms Rightly Wielded.' This was the first sentence ever telegraphed, and it was recorded by the telegraph and preserved. The words were chosen without forethought and were probably from an old anecdote. Then the New York press came out and described the section. Then Morse brought his instrument to the notice of the government, and it was shown at the Franklin institute in Philadelphia, where resolutions were passed that he be invited to give him the means to test it upon an extensive scale. Six persons signed this petition, and Morse took it to Washington late in the session of congress and got one of the members of the committee, put in the rude apparatus and invited congress to come in and see it. Few of them looked upon it with any faith or intelligence. Dickerson, secretary of the navy, dropped a note to Morse from the committee, that 'The president and heads of departments proposed to witness the working instruments of the galvanic magnet-to-morrow at one o'clock, February 18, 1838.'"

"Yes, sir, they did, and it is to be remarked of Martin Van Buren that he was one of the most intelligent and encouraging men to letters and science who ever filled the presidential chair. He walked into the committee room, followed by his cabinet, Forsyth, Woodbury, Poinset and Dickerson. "The chairman of the committee on commerce was F. O. G. Smith, a member of congress from Maine. He had been a warm admirer of Mr. Morse, and had opened his committee-room to help him. Morse was nervously excited. He explained in modest but clear terms his system, and with a steady hand set the instrument to work. There were ten miles of wire on reels in great coils, and as sentence after sentence was spoken at one extremity and written down at the other the cabinet and president began to feel that here was a thing that would probably work in the open air. Morse now sent a memorial to congress for an appropriation, and was referred to the Smith's committee, who signed it, and among them was James L. Mason, afterward the rebel commissioner to England."

"Was there any job in that first telegraph appropriation?" "Well, that is a singular question; but I can answer you that there was. Congressman Smith communicated to Morse his desire to have a pecuniary interest in the matter. He received four shares out of the sixteen into which the whole patent was divided. Morse held nine shares, Smith four, Vail two and Prof. Gale one. For patents in foreign countries, where Smith was to go out as the agent, Morse was to get five shares instead of four, and Smith was to have eight instead of nine. Smith got a candidate for re-election, and was to be paid for his share."

"Did he pay money for his share?" "I cannot swear to that. If he did not, the transaction shows that in those days, as now, a little healthy jobbery might make much more noise than do many Mr. Smith may have paid, but certainly his services to Morse in getting the appropriation were worth his share. Possibly he was to pay out of the profits which were to be put to his account."

"Morse thought that \$30,000 would be enough, but \$40,000 was requested. It was a good while before congress acted, but in the meantime Morse went for the third time to Europe. He waited two years for the appropriation."

"Did Morse give up his art without any remorse?" "Yes; he told one of his pupils one day that he had not eaten for twenty-four hours, and said: 'Do not be an artist; it is beggary. Your life depends upon people who know nothing of your art and care nothing for you. A house dog lives better.'"

"Well, when did Morse come out all right?" "He did not get his patent until 1840. He got some money in the meantime from a Mr. Henry, in America, while Harrison was president: 'I have not got a cent of money in the world.' During these two or three years constant applications were made to congress, but no money came from that source. He waited to go to Washington at all. Morse finally borrowed the money, however, and returned to Washington, set up the telegraph again, and explained to all the members of the house and senate, who stared, giggled, and finally another bill was reported. This time the appropriation was for \$30,000."

"The inventor stood at his instrument, meekly and tearfully talking, with a vacant heart. Congress was to expire in one week. "John P. Kennedy, of Maryland, 'dam literary feller,' took hold of the bill. "Cave Johnson, a Kentucky scrub politician, idiotically proposed to give half the appropriation to the science of mesmerism. Sam Houston said that Millerism ought also to share in the appropriation."

"On February 23, 1842, the appropriation was passed by the house, yeas, 89; nays, 88; majority only of 6. "Morse sat trembling in the gallery, his soul struggling for the aid of an unseen power asking God to help him to a political majority. "The yeas and nays came as follows: New York, yeas, 22; nays, 11; Pennsylvania, yeas, 10; nays, 4; Ohio, yeas, 10; nays, 7; Indiana, yeas, 8; nays, 1; Kentucky, yeas, 8; nays, 4; Tennessee gave 9 yeas and only 1 vote for the telegraph; Georgia cast 4 votes against it and none for it; Alabama 2 against it and none for it; Virginia 13 against it and 3 for it; Mississippi cast 1 vote against it and none for it. "From the slavery states the bill received just 14 votes and the same states cast against it. There were 70 votes from all the different states not cast at all upon the bill. Georgia had 5 members that did not vote, Kentucky 6, Tennessee 3; Missouri furnished no members to vote on the subject. "If by any means the bill should fail," said Mr. Morse, "I shall return to New York without the fraction of a cent of money in my pocket." It passed the senate only a few minutes before midnight. Just a little while before the bill passed, Mr. Morse's old preceptor, Washington

Allston, died in Boston, and Morse went to the funeral. "What was the character of the first line of telegraph built with this appropriation?" "The first idea was to put the wire in tubes underground. Ezra Cornell, father of Governor Cornell, invented a plan for this purpose. Two-thirds of the appropriation was expended in that way foolishly. Then they began to stretch the wires on poles along the Baltimore, Ohio, track. The Whig national convention met in Baltimore on the 1st of May, 1844, and the telegraph announced to Washington the nomination of Henry Clay and Theodore Frelinghuysen. This piece of news made the telegraph a solvent institution, showing that news is the basis of progress in our time."

"Was Morse interested in anything else but telegraphing?" "Oh, yes; you have not begun to get his life. He showed the telegraph to Humboldt in Europe in 1845. He tried to get a further congressional appropriation but failed. Then he took Ames and into the company, and the Magnetic Telegraph company was formed. Congress could have bought the entire invention from Morse for \$100,000 in 1845. It is now paying the telegraph companies, while about \$150,000,000 are invested in American telegraph lines."

"Cave Johnson, of Tennessee, Polk's postmaster-general, who died in 1856, was the enlightened ass who reported that the operation of the telegraph between Baltimore and Washington had not satisfied him; that under any rates of postage that could be adopted its rates could not be made to equal its expenditures. He lost to the people free telegraphy; but this fellow really made the fortune of Mr. Morse. The telegraph company was first composed of Gale, Vail, F. O. G. Smith, Joseph Peck, Kendall, Corcoran and Biggs, Ezra Cornell, and a dozen or twenty others, one of them named Washington. There was \$15,000 paid in. Morse kept going to Europe, where he met Ames and into the company, and his status was put up in New York before he died."

THE BAD BOY AGAIN.

His Pa is Going to be Churched.

Peck's Son. "But what about your pa's dancing a clog dance in church Sunday. The minister's hired girl was here after some coffee yesterday morning, and she said the minister said your pa had scandalized the church the worst way."

"O, he didn't dance in church. He was a little excited, that's all. You see pa chews tobacco and it is pretty hard on him to sit all through the sermon without taking a chew, and he gets nervous. He always reaches around in his pistol pocket, when they stand up to sing the last time, and feels in his tobacco box and gets out a chew, and puts it in his mouth when the minister pronounces the benediction, and then when they get out doors he is all ready to spit. He always does that. Well, my chum had a present, on Christmas, of a music box, just resolved to buy one, and he looked towards pa and everybody looked at pa, too, and pa turned red, and the music box kept up, 'She's a Daisy, She's a Dumpling.' I borrowed it and put it in pa's pistol pocket, where he kept his tobacco, and he kept the music box in his pocket and began to fumble around for a chew. He touched the spring, and just as everybody began to sing he reached for the benediction, and it was so still you could hear a gum drop, the music box began to play, and in the stillness it sounded as loud as a church organ. Well, I thought my chum was a good fellow. The minister heard it and he looked towards pa and everybody looked at pa, too, and pa turned red, and the music box kept up, 'She's a Daisy, and the minister looked mad and said 'Amen,' and people began to put on their coats, and the minister told the deacon to hunt up the source of that worldly music, and they took pa into the room back of the pulpit and searched him, and ma says pa will have to be churched. He kept the music box, and I have got to carry in coal to get money enough to buy my chum a new music box."

"Damages for a Husband and a Mule. Not long since Wakefield Starkey, of Austin, while crossing the track of the International & Great Northern railroad on a valuable mule, which was struck by a locomotive and killed. The mule was also hurled into eternity. Wakefield Starkey, although a perfect gentleman on the street, was a perfect tyrant of the deepest dye. Without any provocation whatever, he used to beat his wife and lock her up in the wardrobe; hence, when she heard of his death, it was not so much a case of heavy bereavement as it was of mitigated affection. As the engineer of the locomotive was clearly to blame for the accident, it was suggested to the widow that she bring a suit for damages. She consulted a lawyer and called at the office of the railroad company. The proper official happened to be in. The widow had such a clear case against the company that it was deemed advisable to compromise the matter. "Now, madame," said the official, after the widow had thrown back her veil and stated her business, "we are willing to do what is fair in this matter. There is really no occasion to go to law. It is a delicate subject to discuss, so I think, without going into the merits of it, I will tender you a check for \$3,000, and you will sign a paper releasing the company from all further demands." The widow started and asked: "How much?" "I am authorized to pay you \$3,000." "I accept it," she said, very much agitated. The check was handed over, and the papers signed, and the widow walked out into the street in a bewildered frame of mind. As she cashed the check she said to herself confidentially: "I didn't expect to get more than \$250, I reckon, that railroad fellow didn't know how old that mule was."

"A Load of Balled Rice. The story of the water which got into the hold of the ship loaded with rice, and so swelled the cargo that it burst the vessel's seams, reminds the editor of The Kinderhook Rough Notes of the captain of a North river sloop, who, having hired a new cook at Albany, set him to cooking rice, which he had done a hundred times. "Being a first-class cook," said the cook, "I will caution him against cooking too much, the captain went about his business of loading his vessel with pig iron. In half an hour the new cook rushed out claiming, 'Don't take on any more pig iron; we will have a load of balled rice before night.'"

"The captain rushed into the cabin where he found the pots, kettles, pans, dishes, and even two wash-tubs full of over-flowing with cooked rice, which was also seething over the top of the kettle and falling off upon the stove and the floor. "What a thunder you been doing!" yelled the skipper, as he glanced around. "How much rice did you put in that pot?" "Put the whole of it," said the lad, "and I've been 'stir' nuthin' but ballin' out rice for the last twenty minutes. Great Moses! where does all the stuff come from?"

"A Great Sight Unseeser. "I say father," observed an irreverent passenger on a ferryboat to a good priest whose mule was displaying signs of uneasiness as the bark pushed off, "your mule seems rather uneasy." "My son," said the good priest, with mild reproach, "some of these days when you find yourself with only a thin plank between yourself and eternity, a halter round your neck and a priest patting you on the shoulder, you'll be a great sight unseeser 'n this erld."

THE EDITOR AND THE POET "Here is a sketch," said the poet unto the editor gray, "That tossed me off in an idle hour, To pass the time away, In a bland and smiling way, 'In a bland and smiling way,' With which I frequently toss me off Six poe in one day."

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