

CABLING BY CODES.

"Remember, that it I telegraph the word 'stability' it means that I have got this post, and then what you have to do is to sell our furniture, pack up, and follow me home to England as quick as steamers will carry you."

So spoke Roger Boxall, Professor of English language and literature at the Japanese University of Nakamouri, to his wife one day before he started homeward on a short leave of absence. He wanted to see English relatives and friends, from whom he had been separated for more than ten years; and he also wished to discover what chance there might be of his obtaining a capital berth as vice-principal in a military academy in England, which he had heard was soon to fall vacant.

"Oh, how I hope you will get it!" exclaimed impetuous little Mrs. Boxall, clasping her hands excitedly. She was utterly sick of Japan. Besides, was not Mr. Boxall taking home her only boy, aged ten, to place him at a good English school. And the thought of the separation was horrible. "It's more probable I shall not get it," he replied. "Anyhow, say over again the lesson I've been teaching you. What does 'stability' mean?"

"Come—come at once." "And what does 'Coromandel' mean?" "Coromandel? Oh, let me think. 'Stay where you are; I am coming back.' But don't let it be 'Coromandel,' dear."

Roger Boxall, a calm, masterful person, frowned at such trifling. He had floated into Japan on the crest of the great tidal wave of European enlightenment that had flooded the country some thirteen years before, and now he wanted to float out again. But his wife must not suppose that good English posts were to be had for the asking.

That same evening he gave her a final coding in the telegraphic signals on which they had decided. He preferred to make her learn the words by heart rather than trust to writing them down on paper. Knowing his wife's flightiness, he felt that it was extremely probable that she would lose any piece of paper—especially one that she was bound to take particular care of—before he had been gone a fortnight. Whereas if he engraved the signals on her brain she could not avoid remembering them.

It was rather a sad parting; husband and wife had never been sundered before, and a voyage half round the globe was no laughing matter. But Roger kept up his wife's spirits as well as he could, until they were actually on the landing quay, and it was time for him to cross the bridge on to the steamer's deck. Then poor little Mrs. Boxall broke down, and amid her sobbing whispered:

"Oh, Roger, dear, you must send me a wire—just one word—directly you arrive in England, to—say you've really got there safely. Promise—promise me this." He promised; he felt it was weak—did not every word cost nearly a pound, and say nothing of addresses, in telegraphing from England to Japan? but he also felt that it would be rather brutal not to humor his wife in her last request.

"What shall I wire?" he asked. "Say, 'I am safe and—quite well, and so is Dick.'" (Dick was the boy). "and we hope to be in London very soon, and—"

"Stop, stop. One word will have to mean all that, what is it to be?" He thought hard; and thinking was difficult just then, with his wife sobbing hysterically, and their little daughter, who had also been brought to see him off, clinging around her mother's neck to comfort her.

The steamer's warning bell sounded briskly. Men were already laying hold of the bridge, ready to drag it back on the quay.

"Problem!" he exclaimed triumphantly; "that will be the word. Good-bye, darlings." And with a last embrace for wife and daughter he tore himself away.

"I hope to goodness," he was saying to himself an hour later, "that she will remember the word, and not confuse it with the others."

There was no need for anxiety on this point, for she recollected it perfectly. So when a month and a half later, she received a telegram which contained the single word "Problem," she knew quite well that the husband and boy had arrived safely, and rejoiced accordingly.

Unfortunately the strain of recollection connected with the last signal, weakened the effect of the lesson which Mr. Boxall had so industriously imparted the day before he set out. It was a week or so afterwards when there was presented to her another telegraphic form, whereon was inscribed "Coromandel"—that and nothing more. A sudden tremor seized her lest the meaning of the shibboleth might have deserted her. But only for a moment. Then she felt almost—yes, quite certain of what "Coromandel" signified.

Still, just to confirm her own view and make assurance doubly sure she went off to consult a lady friend—wife of an English missionary resident at Nakamouri.

"Oh, it's as clear as daylight," concluded this quick-witted matronly woman after half a minute of thought; you are quite right. "Coromandel" must mean 'Come,' and 'Stability' means 'Stay'—don't the initials prove it? Your husband of course chose those words for that very reason."

Mrs. Boxall had not noticed the initials before. Now she felt quite convinced, and began the work of packing and arranging for the sale of the furniture with the lightest of heart. It so happened that the missionary's wife was also going to England on private and domestic business, but not for two months' time; and as Mr. Boxall's little girl was finishing a course of lessons which her father had particularly insisted on her not missing, it was decided that she should stay in Japan for those two months and then come home to England with her mother's friends, who had kindly volunteered to look after her. Mrs. Boxall herself had already written to her husband, telling him of what she was doing, and when he might expect her; and so, within three weeks of receiving the fateful "Coromandel" message, she had embarked and was on her way to England, filled with delightful anticipations.

Somewhere on the Indian Ocean her steamer, homeward bound, must have crossed that bearing her husband back to Japan.

Just before he left London, on his last visit to his mother-in-law in Kensington, she said to him with an anxious sight—she

habitually looked at the gloomiest side of things, owing to an absurdly weak heart:

"Mind and send Jane home soon for a change. I feel sure she needs it." Jane being Mrs. Boxall.

"Ah," he replied, willing to give Jane's mother the comfort of feeling that there was at all events a remote chance of welcoming her daughter again ere long, "I daresay that you will see her here sooner than you expect."

And she did arrive sooner than anybody expected. She had half-hoped that her husband would meet her at Paris. She had left the steamer in the Mediterranean in order to get the quicker to London, and when he failed to do so, she felt certain that at any rate he would be at Charing Cross, as she had telegraphed to him from Dover. But at Charing Cross there was no Mr. Boxall. Not a soul that she knew. And her fellow-travellers from the far East were all being greeted on the platform by hosts of demonstrative relatives and friends, which made her feel still more desolate. What could be the explanation? In a fever and a four-wheeler she drove straight to Kensington, leaving her luggage at the station, and suddenly appeared in her mother's drawing-room, nearly precipitating one of that elderly lady's recurrent heart seizures.

"Where is Roger?" she burst out at once, without waiting to sit down or even offering a daughterly salute.

After a few gasps of mingled astonishment, pleasure and dismay, Mr. Boxall's mother-in-law was able to explain that he had left for Japan precisely a month before.

"Coromandel!" screamed her daughter, and went off into hysterics. It was ten minutes before she even partially recovered. "I sent him a letter!" she at length was able to articulate. "It told him I was coming!"

"I know you did, my dear," replied the old lady. "I noticed your handwriting. It came some time after he had set off. I was quite sorry you had wasted the stamp. And of course I sent it back to Na—to the outlandish Japanese place you live in."

A little later, and Mrs. Boxall's mother was gloomily explaining to her daughter that in her opinion it was all a plot on Roger's part to decoy her home for some reason of his own, a theory which his wife indignantly repudiated.

"It's all very well, your saying he didn't intend it, but why did he tell me just before he left, 'you may see her home sooner than you expect'?" "Those were his very words."

Mrs. Boxall was a little staggered. "Oh," she said after a minute's thought, "he did expect no doubt that we should both be in England before long, because he is tired of his work out there and means coming home soon anyhow. It is all my fault. I see it now. 'Coromandel' meant 'Stay where you are,' without a doubt."

"Coromandel!" repeated the old lady, mystified. "You have used that expression before, my dear. It is Japanese for something."

"Yes, it is Japanese for making an idiot of one's self," Mrs. Boxall replied. "And 'Stability' meant, 'Come at once!' What a horrible chapter of blunders!"

"Stability!" echoed her mother. "My dear, have a glass of our sherry. You must be wandering a little."

"I have wandered a great deal," groaned the daughter; "do you mean to say there is no letter—nothing for me?"

"Yes, yes, my dear. I was forgetting. A telegram came for you two days ago, and I opened it. I could not understand what it meant, or why it had been sent here."

She produced from her desk the despatch, which bore on it the mystic words "Belshazzar. Dixon's Code." It had come all the way from Japan.

In about an hour's time Mrs. Boxall had leaped out of a cab at Dixon's City Office, and demanded to see the Code.

"Belshazzar" meant—"I cannot understand your conduct. Wire explanation at once."

Mrs. Boxall accordingly purchased a rather expensive Code-book, sold at the office, and went back to her mother's with it. When there she hunted up the phrase which most nearly conveyed the meaning—

"All a mistake. Expect me to return by next steamer. I will write full particulars." And when she had sent it off she found that it had cost her nearly three guineas. What would her husband say to her when next she saw him? Then he had not obtained the coveted appointment after all! And she had simply wasted the cost of her journey to Europe, and besides, had sold all the furniture of their Japanese home! She hardly dared to think of what she had done, and to drown thought, as well as from other and more motherly motives, she spent the afternoon in a hurried visit to her boy at the boarding-school where his father had just left him.

Some five or six days after she had really left Kensington on her melancholy return journey to the hateful East, another telegraphic message arrived at her mother's house. It was from Mr. Boxall to Mrs. Boxall, and contained the one word "Bucephalus."

How Mrs. Boxall's mother's heart fluttered at this new enigma! If she were fated to be disturbed by constant telegrams from the antipodes, then she preferred to know what the messages were about. Her daughter, she meditated, must have got to Marseilles and beyond it by this time—she was going out by a cheap French line—so obviously, the best course seems to be to forward the telegram to Suez, there to await the arrival of the steamer. And in this way "Bucephalus" was sent prancing back along the wires.

Unfortunately, when Mrs. Boxall received him at Suez she could not fit him with any harness. In other words she had left Dixon's Code-book behind her in London, and there was no copy on board, neither had she time to land and try to obtain sight of one. She was compelled to voyage onward to Japan with the mystery unsolved.

Arrived at Nakamouri, it was delightful to behold on the quay a great friend of her husband's, another English professor at the University, a Mr. Wildman. Beyond a doubt he had been sent by her husband to welcome her on landing! In a few brief moments she would see Rogers himself again! She sprang lightly across the bridge, leaped on to the quay, and the next moment was shaking hands briskly with the professor, who looked both pleased and unfeignedly astonished to see her.

"How good of you to meet me! My husband—is he busy? Why has he not come?" A sudden unhappy thought had

occurred to her—her husband might be ill. Mr. Wildman saw the tears in her eyes, and began to be seriously disturbed at the situation.

"Your husband! My dear Mrs. Boxall, what do you mean? Is it possible you do not know— you have not heard?"

"Not dead?" she exclaimed hysterically. "Oh dear no! Nothing of the sort. He is quite well, I believe. At least he was when he started."

"Started!" she half screamed, "started! Where to?"

"Oh, really, my dear Mrs. Boxall, you must be calm. There must be some stupid mistake. It—"

"Where to—where to?" she screamed in his ear, so loudly that he began to wish that he had been anywhere else than on Nakamouri Landing Quay at that precise moment. In sheer desperation he blurted out:

"To England. He sent a telegram—"

But poor Mrs. Boxall, exclaiming "Bucephalus!" had fainted on his arm. An hour later she was sitting in the Quay Superintendent's little gimcrack bonnet-box that served as a house, sipping cold brandy and water, somewhat more composed. Mr. Wildman was at her side. He thought he might now complete his sentence.

"He sent a telegram to you in London. Did you not get it?"

"He sent me two. One was forwarded to Suez."

"The last one told you he was coming home again."

"Ah, 'Bucephalus!' I see it all now."

"Home again with your little girl."

"But why? He has not got that appointment. Then what induced him to leave?"

"He was tired of life here, I think. Then he was rather—er—shocked to find that you were not here yourself, and that he had—er—no home, and—er—in fact, no furniture. He felt sure he should get something to do in England. Of course he expected to find you there."

"It is too dreadful!" she sobbed. "And my girl—was she well?"

"Oh, quite; except her eyesight. It has gone a little wrong; and Boxall wanted to get the best London advice. That was another thing that took him home."

It was another blow to little Mrs. Boxall, too. She went to stay with the missionary's wife, who comforted her by telling her that all she had to do was to write a good long letter to her husband saying what she had done, and why, and telling him that she proposed returning at once to join him.

"And I should go back the other way—across America," advised her friend. "Then you will be able to say you have been right around the world."

"But I don't care about going around the world," she answered. "I wish there were no world to go around. I wish I could go straight through the middle and get to London in a week. Here am I in Japan and my family in England? I don't believe that I shall ever see them again."

"Oh, nonsense! You must try and see the humorous side of it. It's like a game of hide-and-seek all over the globe. Or that game of 'Post' we used to play in the nursery. When 'General Post' was called out, everybody changed places with everybody else. One corner of the room was Constantinople, and another was Calcutta, and you rushed across."

"I wish it were only a room between us," sighed Mrs. Boxall.

She took her friend's advice, however, and wrote to her husband, explaining everything. She told him exactly by what steamer, on what day she would leave, and added—"Before you receive this, I hope to be well on my way home, for the last time. I am telegraphing to say I am coming."

She did telegraph one word only, got from Dixon's Code, which she knew her husband used. And leaving word with her friend that in case any telegram from England arrived for her, it was to be sent on to meet her at Aden, she started in not such very bad spirits on what she trusted would be her final tour across the Indian Ocean.

Mr. Boxall's state of mind, meanwhile, was not enviable. He had fully expected that his "Bucephalus" telegram would have kept his wife in England, and his disgust at finding her flown back to Japan must be imagined.

However, it was fortunate that he had arrived just then, because only two days after landing he heard of an excellent position as headmaster of a small but venerable grammar school in the north of England. In a week more he had sent in his testimonials, and soon after heard that he had been appointed. He at once telegraphed out to his wife in Japan. The missionary's wife did as she had promised and—Mrs. Boxall having left a fortnight before—forwarded the dispatch to Aden, to await the steamer homeward bound.

Now on that steamer Mrs. Boxall was enjoying herself much more than she had expected to do, owing to the presence on board of a delightful Australian judge and his wife, who were on their way to England and who proved most kind and sympathetic. The judge said that he had never heard of such an extraordinary game of cross purposes: his wife said that Mrs. Boxall must sit next to them at every meal, and consult them about everything, and not mope.

At Aden the telegram was duly handed to her. It had two words this time—"Eccecentricity, Bohemia." The mere sight of the document filled her soul with trepidation, and she rushed off for advice to her good friends the Australian couple, who were fanning themselves vigorously under the awning, seated on deck chairs.

"Don't distress yourself at all," said the judge. "I'll see what the words mean for you. I have a Code-book in my portmanteau." And he marched off at once to unearth it. In a few minutes he came back.

"This is what it means," said the judge: "I'm afraid it's not exactly what you want: 'I am coming. Wait till I arrive.' I've copied it out of the book, so there can be no mistake."

"Coming where? Arrive where?" asked Mrs. Boxall, breathlessly.

"Well—um," stammered the judge. "It looks as if it must mean that your husband is coming out to where you were, that is Japan. I'm afraid it must mean that. Clara, catch her."

But his wife was too late, for Mrs. Boxall had already subsided on the deck. If anything could have lessened the effect of this new shock, it would have been the sympathy lavished on her, first by the judge and his wife, and then by nearly everybody on board who heard the story.

"You must return instantly to Japan," said the judge. "It's the only course open to you. Your husband is going there and you'll probably arrive about the same time. It's lucky you haven't got further than Aden."

"But if he is going out, why should I not wait here for him?" pleaded poor distraught Mrs. Boxall.

"He may be going out the other way—through America."

Finally she decided to do as the judge advised. But first of all she wrote her mother a long letter, in which she declared she was certain that she would never see her husband again. The judge's wife had promised to visit Kensington and call upon that lady directly she arrived in London. With an inexpressibly heavy heart Mrs. Boxall left the steamer, stayed two days at a baking hotel at Aden, and then caught a P. and O. steamer to Hong-Kong, whence she could get a passage to Japan.

Behold her, therefore, about a month later, by an almost inconceivable series of misunderstandings, arrived once more at the port of Nakamouri—which she had twice already abandoned, as she thought for good.

No kindly professor loomed on the quay. The rain descended in sheets. She drove to the missionary's house only to find that his wife had left for Europe. She needed the face of a friend, and she drove on at once to Professor Wildman's abode, and asked to see him, though he was a bachelor. Necessity knows no proprieties.

Astonishment and consternation are poor words to express the feelings with which the professor beheld Mrs. Boxall once again.

"But—but," he said, without waiting to shake hands, "did you not get the telegram that was sent on to Aden?" Mrs. Carter, old Carter's wife, you know, distinctly told me that she had forwarded it."

"Yes—and it meant that my husband was coming out to Japan."

"No—it meant that you were to join him in England."

"Oh—Bohemia!" was all that Mrs. Boxall could ejaculate before fainting dead away. Mr. Wildman's inexpressible disgust.

The first words she uttered when she came to were:

"But the judge looked it up in the Code himself."

"What judge?" asked Mr. Wildman. "Whoever he was he made a complete mistake."

An awful idea flashed upon her brain. Could the judge and his wife have been deceiving her?

The professor had recovered from his first astonishment; the reaction had set in, and he had now relapsed into gloom.

"I've heard from your husband—a letter—he's a lucky fellow. He has a first-rate English berth now. Wish I had."

This was the first that Mrs. Boxall had heard of the appointment, and she was too utterly depressed to care to ask what it was. She drove off to an hotel, and decided on the very best course she could possibly have adopted. She would not stir from where she was until she had a letter from her husband, giving her full directions what to do and where to go. She would trust to enigmatic telegrams no longer.

The professor when he heard of this resolution strongly approved.

"It's like a man losing a dog in the street," he remarked. "The best way to find it is not to go hunting for it, but to stay where he is. Sooner or later the dog comes back. And sooner or later you will have a letter from Boxall."

It was later rather than sooner, but it came at length, in response to one sent home by his distracted wife. When it came it cheered her wonderfully. She expected it to be filled with reproaches for all the money she had spent. On the contrary it expressed greatest sorrow for her misfortune; what blame there was he reserved for himself.

"Those friends you made on the ship," he wrote, "the Australian judge and his wife, called on me and explained the whole thing. The words I telegraphed, 'Eccecentricity, Bohemia,' mean in Dixon's Code 'I have got appointment; come at once.' Unfortunately the judge used Tweedie's Code instead, and forgot there was any other in existence; and it so happened that in Tweedie's Code the same words mean 'I am coming; wait till I arrive.' That was how you were sent back from Aden to Japan, when I was expecting you every day in England. I must say that the judge was deeply cut up about his mistake. He says he shall never forgive himself, and insists that he must pay all the extra expenses you have been put to. He is a brick, and is sending his two boys to my school. Even your mother calls him a most polite man, outwardly adding, 'too polite to be quite genuine, I fear.' The heart has been rather troublesome of late. I long to show you my school; such a delightful house, in a picturesque moorland country."

Then he went to say that Mrs. Boxall might make herself quite easy about her boy and girl, who were perfectly well. He himself was not obliged to take up his appointment for four months longer. So he proposed, as some consolation after all their troubles, that they should meet half way, and enjoy a pleasant trip home together. She must do exactly as he told her, and then they would be sure to meet. He would start from Liverpool in a month's time from the despatch of his letter for Aden, and she must leave Japan for the same place as soon as she received it. He added, "Aden will be so new to both of us."

"Oh, I shall see him again!" she exclaimed, with happy tears in her eyes. "But his writing has not improved; and I did not know any steamer for the Mediterranean started from Liverpool; but he is sure to judge best. And that Aden being so new to us is evidently a joke. The hateful oven! I know it by heart."

It was well that she had this transient gleam of happiness; that all the way back to Aden her heart was full of blissful expectations; because—But it now becomes necessary to shift the scene to another steamer, ploughing the Atlantic waves between England and America, at a date three months after Mrs. Boxall's farewell to Japan.

Nobody who has followed that lady's strange adventure so far, will be surprised to hear that Mrs. Boxall was a passenger on the Atlantic steamer! It had come about thus. For three weary weeks she had waited for her husband at Aden. But he came not. In desperation she at length hurried on to England, again starting her mother almost into her grave by her sudden

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den and violent appearance in the Kensington drawing room.

Then it had all come out. Mr. Boxall wrote what is called a "running hand." And what his wife had read as instructions to meet him at Aden was in reality a pressing invitation to her to share a homeward journey from Ogden, U. S. A., the alternative route to England for visitors from Japan.

"He said it was so near Salt Lake City, you know," explained her mother. "And he wanted to go and see the Mormons." "The Mormons!" exclaimed his wife. "Yes, my dear. It's very suspicious," replied her mother, whose heart did not admit of too favorable an estimate of anyone.

The only satisfaction that Mrs. Boxall did receive at Kensington, was in hearing from her mother something else that had been said by Mr. Boxall just before he started.

"If by chance I don't meet her at Ogden, I shall simply stay there till she comes," he had announced.

"Very well, then," she thought. "My obvious duty is to go out to him there and bring him home. After all, it is only about half the distance to Japan. Only a quarter round the world this time," she said to herself with a deep sigh. And that was how she came to be on that Transatlantic steamer's deck in that month of October.

She longed for the ship to fly through the waves. If it deserved its name of greyhound, why did it mind head winds, which prevailed to an exasperating extent? To add to her legitimate grievances, when within one day's steam of New York a terrific gale was encountered.

It lasted the whole of one day, and blew itself out by nightfall. Then there followed two of the worst accompaniments of a sea voyage—a heavy swell and a thick fog.

The engines were reduced to half-speed. Mrs. Boxall had only just gone to her cabin, late at night, when she was flung to the ground by what seemed an invisible hand stretched out to assail her.

A terrible crashing, rending noise was heard; then the rushing about of hasty footsteps on the deck above her, with shouting. She raced on deck amid screaming lady passengers, to find that the boats were being lowered! The mist was lifting, and the black hull of another vessel could be seen close at hand, with its row of port-hole lights.

There has been a collision in mid-sea between two mighty liners, neither of which lived and floated for more than an hour after the shock. Fortunately there was no crowd of passengers, and before long every soul on the steamer that carried Mrs. Boxall had been got without accident into the boat.

On the other steamer all was hurry, for she was settling down fast. No more than four boat loads had been safely launched, when she gave a plunge forward, then reeled sideways, and with lights still burning and funnels still smoking, disappeared hissing beneath the waves.

An awful momentary silence followed. Then shouts and screams were heard from the water on all sides. The boats already afloat rescued many a drowning sailor and passenger from death. That which carried Mrs. Boxall and her fortunes had already a dangerously large number on board, when a poor wretch was seen close by clinging to a spar, almost exhausted. The sailors looked at each other and shook their heads.

"Oh, save him!" cried poor little Mrs. Boxall, wringing her hands.

"It must be the last, then!" said the mate, and pulled the man in over the gunwale. Mrs. Boxall caught one glimpse of his face, screamed, then swooned helplessly away.


It was her husband! Strengthless, half unconscious, numbed, and dripping—but still Mr. Boxall. He would not have been there had he not repented of his resolution to stay at Ogden for an indefinite time, and decided on hurrying home to England instead.

And to this day Mrs. Boxall can hardly be brought to look upon that collision as a disaster, although several persons perished in it, and it was a whole day before the boats were picked up; for without it, she solemnly believed that she would never have beheld her husband's countenance again.

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