



WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE:

Jonathan Blake, protege of John Angerstein, underwriter at Lloyds of London, has graduated from Eton and entered the business of his patron. Time and again, the need for quick transmission of news has been voiced by the insurance men, and Jonathan devises a visual telegraph which sends messages across the English Channel in five minutes instead of two days. In France, troubled times increase the importance of swift news transmission. Meanwhile, in the Navy, Jonathan's boyhood friend, Admiral Nelson, is making England "mistress of the sea."

CHAPTER EIGHT

The success of Jonathan Blake's simple contrivance for news transmission to England from the Continent could not be better exemplified than the scene in Lloyd's Board Room on July 14th, 1789, when, in response to the clanging of the bell, the following appeared on the bulletin board:

REVOLUTION BROKE OUT IN PARIS TODAY. MOB STORMED THE BASTILLE LIBERATING ALL PRISONERS.

A profound silence followed the posting of this bulletin; then, as with one voice, the members shouted: "Today! Today! Impossible! How can news get across the Channel in one day? Who is the author of this attempted hoax?"

John Angerstein strode up on the rostrum and struck the ancient bell twice. Instantly the hubbub ceased. "The news, gentlemen," he said, "is authentic. Do you remember that day in 1770 that a ragged urchin invaded our old quarters crying for Mr. Lloyd and proclaiming at the top of his voice that the schooner Maggie-O, but at that moment reported sunk, had been scuttled by her master and a fortune in gold ingots transferred from her to the Seahorse first. When that news proved to be true, Lloyd saved a loss of a hundred thousand pounds, gave that ragged urchin a gratuity of one thousand pounds. He was among us that day with prompt news which saved us, although he had walked a hundred miles to deliver his message. Well, for a long time he has been working on an invention that would permit the relaying of messages from France to England; the message before us came over before dawn this morning, in about fifteen minutes, in a dozen relays, by means of Jonathan Blake's signalling device. I know whereof I speak, for I have financed this invention. I guarantee the authenticity of that news."

There was another long silence, then a thunder of applause and cries for Jonathan to step to the rostrum and explain his signalling system. But John Angerstein waived that suggestion down. "You must realize, gentlemen, that in war time governments have a habit of restricting news to suit those in power. The means Jonathan Blake employs to relay information, therefore, must remain a secret."

And remain a secret it did. Each morning on Lloyd's bulletin board appeared notices of momentous events in history. The authenticity of such news was no longer doubted; too long and too often had those bulletins been confirmed by news, via ships, a week or less later. Thus, Lloyd's knew of the guillotining of Marie Antoinette an hour after the execution; it knew of the capture of Toulon from the English by troops under command of Napoleon Bonaparte, an hour after the news had been given to the public in Paris.

All during those stirring years Jonathan Blake's desk at Lloyd's was occupied by another, for Jonathan was busy doing more important work. He was a fairly familiar figure there, however, but his visits were more of a social nature than because he was interested in the marine insurance, per se. The world-rocking events occurring across the channel, following the fall of the Bastille and the gradual rise of Napoleon Bonaparte to power, kept him in France a great part of the time. And, incidentally, his activities became a source of considerable interest to the powers that were in France. The leakage of news, was not, upon occasion, at all to their liking or to their profit.

Upon the night of October 22nd, Jonathan Blake arrived in the hovel hat and long black souter of a French cure, climbed the stairs to a tall stone tower on a particularly lonely stretch of the French coast. Above the tower rose a huge, four-bladed wind-mill. On the roof of the tower were two men — one gazing through a night glass out across the country, the other writing on a pad of paper.

"Well, men, what news?" Jonathan queried in French as he joined the pair.

"Relays from Paris inform us that Napoleon has ordered the arrest of all English in France."

"I've been expecting that. Jean, have you been able to pick up the signals from our relay ship in the channel?"

"Yes, sir. Shall I send the news of which I have just spoken, or do you think we had best withhold that?"

"It will cause a deal of worry to those in England who have agents or relatives in France. However, it is world news, so send it."

The signalling device the men used was merely a clumsy imitation of the heliograph of the late nineties or the "blinker" light system in use on battleships today. Within a metal case was a powerful "bull's-eye" oil lantern, the thickness of the bull's-eye concentrating the light project thru it until a beam of two hundred candle power was produced. By means of a hand lever a shutter was operated in front of this beam, thus alternately opening the beam or shutting it off entirely. Jonathan had merely designed a telegraph system, the number of blinks and their duration indicated letters. From the top of windmill tower, which stood on a bluff a hundred feet above the beach, these signals were easily read by a ship cruising in the channel half way across to England, and this ship relays to another tower on the white cliffs of Dover. The message finally finished, the ship acknowledged its receipt in full with another rocket. Pierre extinguished the lamp and, with his companions followed Jonathan downstairs into a room at the base of the stone wind-mill tower. From a canvas bag Jonathan produced a handful of Louis d'or.

"I shall pay you, Pierre, and you Marcel, for several months in advance, and trust to you to continue to send all important news nightly."

"Oui Monsieur," the two Frenchmen murmured.

"Thank you. My Paris agent will visit you from time to time, when you need more money. As for myself, it is my intention to take the hint and get out of Calais tonight. For all I know I may be suspected and if captured I shall, of course, have a swift introduction to Mademoiselle Guillotine. Adieu, My friends."

"Go with God," they murmured.

Leaving the signal tower, Jonathan strode along a path on top of the bluffs for about two miles before he entered Calais. At a cafe on the waterfront he turned in, when he saw two French soldiers, with fixed bayonets, standing at the entrance. A cafe, Jonathan knew, was a dispensing ground for news and gossip; apparently these soldiers were there watching for some unfortunate to emerge; he reasoned they would not be suspicious of one, who, after observing their presence, persisted in entering.

He was right. The two soldiers moved aside and gave him a respectful salutation as he entered. At a side table he sat down and ordered a meal; as he waited for it to be served he could not help

but notice the atmosphere of apprehension among the other customers.

"I observed two soldiers as I entered," he observed to the waiter. "What does that portend?"

"Who knows, monsieur le cure. The whole world is suspect. One knows not the instant when on mere suspicious, he will be taken from the bosom of his family, tossed into jail or guillotined. We live in terrible times."

"Aye, we do, but God will lead our beloved France into the ways of peace and happiness again."

He was interrupted, when half way through his meal, by a man wearing the rough garb of a fisherman. "Good evening," the fisherman saluted him respectfully. "I trust your reverence will pardon the interruption, but I go upon a long journey tonight—a journey fraught with some danger, wherefore I beg your blessing before I depart."

"Certainly, my son," Jonathan replied and the fisherman knelt beside his table while Jonathan, a far better Latin scholar than any village priest in France could possibly be, murmured the blessing; as he made the sign of the cross over the man's bent head and then dropped his hand, the fisherman brought a few coppers from his pocket and pressed them into Jonathan's palm. "For the poor of our parish, m father," he murmured, rose, bowed, and went clumping down the stairs.

As Jonathan slipped the coins into his pocket he felt a tiny scrap of paper pasted on one coin and covered by the other. He disengaged this paper without removing his hand from his capacious pocket, in which rested also a breviary. Between the pages of the breviary he slipped the paper and then continued to eat his late supper. At its conclusion he called for a wine, brought forth his breviary and appeared to be reading it while sipping the wine.

On the paper the fisherman had slipped to him he read:

WEST 1 KILOMETER — STONE QUAY — BARREL X.

He rolled the message into a pill, after committing it to memory, palmed it into his mouth and swallowed it. He continued to read his breviary, oblivious of all around him, until his attention was withdrawn from the book by the sound of a commotion at the far end of the room. Down the stairs from the hotel rooms above came a beautiful young girl followed by a French lieutenant and two oldiers. "But this is an outrage," the girl cried angrily — in English. "How dare you place me in arrest, I have

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