

# **CABLE TALK: RELATIONS BETWEEN THE HEART'S CONTENT AND VALENTIA CABLE STATIONS 1866 - 1886**

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## **Introduction**

In 1866 the first permanent termini were established on either side of the Atlantic. These acted as relay points to the centres of commerce and population in Europe and America. The strategic and financial impact of rapid communications have been much cited and various aspects have been investigated in depth [1,2] In general there has been little attention to the stations themselves and in particular to the staff who worked there. This is all the more surprising because they were the computer whizz kids of the 19th century, generally of humble origin, highly paid and amongst the first to work an eight hour day. In their far-flung stations the staff (mostly British until the arrival of Stentafor [3] and O'Sullivan [4]) lived as isolated microcosms of Empire, so that wherever records are available, there is the potential for valuable sociological research.

The station staffs were people with ambition, aspirations, problems. There were family dynasties such as Graves [5], Tranfield [6], Scaife [7], Mackey [8] who have helped to retain memories. Nevertheless, many others have passed into obscurity, although a few such as Kennelly [9], Heaviside [10], and of a much later date, Moores [11] have made lasting names for themselves.

This paper takes a glimpse at some of the early staff. Using available family and archive records it examines the causes of the acrimony which rapidly developed between the two stations and which did not become resolved until the late 1870s.

## **The Beginnings**

The commencement of operations at Heart's Content was not smooth and one could put forward the hypothesis that the inter-station feuding may have had its origins in the multiplicity of telegraph companies in the UK prior to nationalisation in 1871. There was the Electric and International Telegraph Co., The British and Irish Magnetic Telegraph Co. and many others. Graves at Valentia had been employed by the Electric and International Telegraph Co., had acquitted himself well as the clerk-in-charge of their new Channel Islands Office, had proved to be an excellent submarine electrician on their cable repair ship, Monarch, had been seconded to the Atlantic Telegraph Co and later the Anglo American Telegraph Co to oversee the electrical testing of their cable as it was being manufactured by the Telegraph Construction & Maintenance Co. in London. In short, his pedigree was good.

When the Great Eastern landed the cable senior staff were Lundy and Collett. Their complement of clerks included E. Weedon, F. Perry, C. Trippe, W. Woodcock and G. Unicum. J. Sullivan was the book-keeper [12]. Lundy was the first Superintendent but had left by October 1866 [13]. Richard Collett, the Anglo Traffic Manager, opted to stay on at Heart's Content until a successor could be found.

Almost from the beginning things were not good. Graves [14] recorded in his technical autobiography " The Traffic Manager who was to a most apparent degree ignorant of all electrical principles and at the same time of an arbitrary and cantankerous overbearing disposition clearly visible in all his telegrams and correspondence, began to become unbearable numerous false charges were brought against my station and I defended the right". The letterbooks (Letters-out 1866 - ) in the Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador

confirm these views. There is every indication that he ruled by fear and found fault with all around him. A scheme of fines for operator errors was introduced. Nevertheless he had his favourites and amongst these was Ezra Weedon whom he arranged to have promoted to clerk-in-charge after his return to London in 14 November 1866 and who was eventually confirmed Superintendent in 1867. Collett also had 'friends' at Valentia, namely E. George (who moved to London as Clerk-in-Charge[15] and J.T. Smythe (" . . . they having all three been connected before entering the Anglo American Company's Service[16]. . ."). These two made Graves' task very difficult as he dealt with numerous complaints some of which were unjustified: ".... The attention at VA is not so good as I should wish, neither do I approve of clerks going to meals and leaving only a boy to watch the mirror [17]. . . " Some complaints between stations were understandable, such as acrimony between operators and the use of bad language over the line [18]. The ill will was compounded by Weedon (who in Collett's eyes could do no wrong), who appears to have hated Graves and complained about the use of inexperienced people at the instruments. Graves retorts that Va is a training school for NF, and takes all his good staff. It must therefore suffer learners. Weedon observes that there is something wrong at VA [19]. Several other communications from Weedon to Collett in June 1869 record "VA is not good with ciphers", "VA is not good at detecting miscounts"

### **Nemesis**

But things were set to change and it all seemed to happen at once. In 1870 the inland telegraphs in the United Kingdom were nationalised and came under the control of the Post Office. In early April of that year Mr Collett announced by wire his retirement from the Company. Within a short time he was replaced by Henry Weaver, late Secretary of the Electric and International Telegraph Co [20]. He was a highly respected person and almost immediately things began to run more smoothly. Coincidentally the Company had purchased and fitted out a repair ship, the Robert Lowe and were planning to repair the 1866 cable which had been out of service since it was damaged by an iceberg close to Heart's Content in September 1869. The ship was to sail to St. Johns where it was to pick up Ezra Weedon, who was to oversee the repair. At short notice Weedon announced that he was too ill to go and Graves, upon being asked, agreed to take his place. He travelled to London on 26 June 1870 and while there discovered that Collett had placed before the Board of the Company a dossier of 'faults, omissions and shortcomings' which he attributed to Graves. The Board had approached the Chairman (Hon. Robert Grimston) and the Secretary (Henry Weaver) of the Electric and International Telegraph Co, to quote Graves [21] "for their opinion upon them as being men of long experience in telegraphic management. The result of which was the 'retirement' of Mr Collett".

### **Resolution**

The repair operation was a major success. The iceberg damage, 3 miles from Heart's Content was quickly located. Other faults at 69 and 74 miles were located and following soundings they were able to reroute the cable away from a bad patch of seabed. While in the vicinity they also undertook repairs to the French cable off St Pierre in early September. Thus in addition to the technical details of repair, there had been an opportunity for Graves to meet and talk with various station staffs and it is believed that this helped to foster good relations.

In spite of the success they discovered on arrival back in London on 11 October that the 1866 cable had once again been damaged, this time somewhat nearer to Heart's Content. Neither Graves or the ship's captain were willing to undertake the exercise so late in the year. Nevertheless Smythe eagerly volunteered and under the command of a relief captain the Robert Lowe [22] returned to Newfoundland. While trying to grapple for the damaged cable on 23 November she dragged and cut the 1865 cable and until the Telegraph Construction and Maintenance Co's ship Scandaria completed the repairs in early June 1871 all trans-Atlantic traffic went through the French Brest-St Pierre cable.

Thus the effect of Collett's henchmen was almost totally eliminated; In August 1871 Mr George in London had been replaced by J.H. Carson, one of Valentia's senior cable operators (who eventually succeeded Weaver as Traffic manager). This left only Weedon and in 1879 he was to incur the wrath of Weaver over the question of cable duplex. He had been ill and from time to

time the clerk-in-charge, Fred Perry (like Graves and ex-employee of the Electric and International Telegraph Co.) took over and much impressed London by the effectiveness of his management. This was at about the same time that the Company was installing the Stearns system of simultaneous bi-directional operation on their cables (this proved to be a bad decision as it was very difficult to adjust and in any event, Muirhead, the instrument maker in London was able to demonstrate that the Stearns system contravened his patents). The Graves autobiography records the difficulties which were experienced in getting the system to work at all. It makes no mention of the lack of collaboration by Heart's Content. Dickenson, the Heart's Content Station mechanic had devised his own form of sending key. This was ardently supported by Weedon in spite of its demonstrated lack of suitability and this seemed to sour relations. On 6 June 1879 Weaver is communicating with Weedon, about duplex but is informed by Perry that Weedon is unwell. Perry then goes on to comment on Weedon's pigheadedness over duplex, even to the point of deception. Graves and Weaver were taking speed measurements, Weedon was not, so that London had to guesstimate the working speed. On 29 September 1879 we find Weaver enquiring from Perry "... was Dickenson in part responsible for obstructing Stearn's progress?"

And so at last with Perry in charge at Heart's Content, Graves in Valentia and Weaver and Carson in London relations between the two stations reached an amicable working level which was retained thereafter. And what of the two survivors? They did as many operators had done before; they talked to each other over the cable in verse [23]. Within the Graves collection of papers a sequence of Christmas greetings have survived (reproduced in the Appendix) and these give an indication of the extent of cordial relations which existed at 1886 and beyond.

### **Conclusions**

The euphoria associated with the laying of the trans-Atlantic cables completely overshadowed many daunting problems. There was no previous experience of either the technology or business of long distance communication. Neither was there any understanding of the social provisions for the efficient working of the staff; there was no appreciation of the cold of the Newfoundland winter and the Valentia island during this period was five wet miles away from the nearest centre of habitation. Thus the initial period could be described as nothing short of chaotic. At the very least each terminus should have had a technologist and a business man as well as someone with age and authority, possibly one of the directors. The Anglo American Telegraph Co. appears to have learnt nothing from its ill-fated predecessors, the Atlantic Telegraph Co. whose 1858 fiasco can be largely ascribed to their overbearing and pig-headed electrician Dr E.O.W. Whitehouse [24]. At least Collett was not a technologist. Graves appears to have been a conscientious boss at Valentia. He was a good electrical engineer and a reasonably good business man. Nevertheless, given the ages of Weedon and Graves, it is shocking even by today's standards to conceive of the weight of responsibility that was rested upon them.

Collett did an enormous amount of damage and was certainly responsible for the initiation and continuation of inter-station feuding. It is to the credit of Henry Weaver that he managed to ensure the repair of relations and to get the company back on an even keel. However, by the time he came on the scene the Anglo was already facing stiff competition and was forever afterwards the economic lame-duck on the Atlantic route.

In an enterprise of this magnitude (with so many unknowns) it was (as it still is) critically important to have things right from the outset. One can only speculate on how differently things might have progressed if the working relations between the stations had been good from the very beginning.

## References

1. R.J. Cain, *Telegraph Cables in the British Empire*, PhD thesis, Duke University 1970
2. G. Kieve, *The Electric Telegraph*, David and Charles Newton Abbott, 1973
3. Samuel Seymour Stentaforde was the first native Newfoundlander to be employed at Heart's Content. He was first employed by Cyrus Field's New York, Newfoundland and London Telegraph Co which was taken over by the Anglo American Telegraph Co in 1873. One of his sons eventually became Superintendent at Heart's Content.
4. O' Sullivan (several of that name) was the first native Irish family to be employed at Valentia. Others, including the Rings were still associated with the station at closedown.
5. James Graves (the first Superintendent at Valentia) could boast a son and Grandson working at that station within his own lifetime. His great grandson, worked there during the first world war and was a Western Union employee on the Azores during the second world war.
6. F. Tranfield was one of the original three station staff at the Valentia island cable station. He did not get on with J. Graves and moved to Waterville when the Commercial Cable Co. opened there in 1885. Later family worked both for Western Union and Commercial.
7. W. T. Scaife came to Valentia from the Post Office telegraphs in Haverford West, Wales. and became Superintendent of the Valentia Station in May 1919. His son worked at Valentia and his grandson was a Western Union employee in London during the second world war.
8. Robert Blenkinsop Mackey arrived in Valentia in 1866 and died there in 1917. He had six sons by two marriages. All joined the cable service. His grandson, Bob, was the last Superintendent at Heart's Content.
9. Arthur Edwin Kennelly submarine electrician in charge of the diversion of the Direct United States cable from Tor Bay (NS) into Halifax in October 1887. He subsequently worked as one of Thomas A. Edison's principle engineers and eventually, as Professor of Engineering at Harvard (1902 - 1930) and MIT (1913 - 1924) was the acknowledged doyen of American electrical engineers. He pioneered the use of complex variables which significantly reduces the complexity of AC circuit analysis and at about the same time as Oliver Heaviside (v.i), predicted the existence of a charged layer around the earth, the Kennelly Heaviside Layer, which assists the long distance propagation of radio waves.
10. Oliver Heaviside, Mathematician who predicted the technique of inductive loading which was used on the high speed cables of the middle and late 1920s (eg Bay Roberts-Penzance No. 3). In his youth he had worked for the Great Northern Telegraph Co.
11. John Moores, founder of Littlewoods, the largest football pools company in the UK, was an operator at the Commercial Cable Co. station at Waterville in the early 1920s
12. From references to earliest staff in the Heart's Content Letter Books and Diaries 1866 - 70

13. in Letters Out, Heart's Content Letter Books and Diaries 1866 - 70 (Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Laborador, St Johns, Nfld)
14. J. Graves, *36 Years in the Telegraph Service*, unpublished autobiography p. 122
15. J. Graves, *36 Years in the Telegraph Service*, unpublished autobiography p. 140
16. J. Graves, *36 Years in the Telegraph Service*, unpublished autobiography p. 165
17. Collett to Graves 26/9/1866, Heart's Content Letter Books and Diaries 1866 - 70 (Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Laborador, St Johns, Nfld)
18. Graves to Weedon in May 1872 says " This morning 10.21 - 10.26 calling with no.6 on receiving your 82. Motion badly spaced. Asked civilly for repetitions necessary and to space better. NF replied: next time you want repetitions as for them - hold your gab and no talk to us" (Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Laborador, St Johns, Nfld)
19. Weedon to Collett 29/5/ 1869, Heart's Content Letter Books and Diaries 1866 - 70(Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Laborador, St Johns, Nfld)
20. J. Graves, *36 Years in the Telegraph Service*, unpublished autobiography p. 187
21. J. Graves, *36 Years in the Telegraph Service*, unpublished autobiography p. 193
22. The Robert Lowe foundered off Cape St. Mary on 20 November 1873 and sixteen of those on board including its master, Capt. James Tidmarsh were lost.
23. The entire question of verse prompted by technological advances is an area which is ripe for extensive research. In the Library of the Institution of Electrical Engineers in London there is a poem by the physicist James Clarke Maxwell concerning the ill fated 1857 trans-Atlantic cable. He describes the refrain as ". . . a perfect thicket of vain repetitions. To avoid these let (U) = 'under the sea', so that 2(U) by parity of reasoning represents two repetitions of that sentiment"

*The song of the Atlantic Telegraph Co.*

2(U)  
 Mark how the telegraph motions to me,  
 2(U)  
 Signals are coming along,  
 With a wag,wag, wag,  
 The telegraph needle is vibrating free,  
 And every vibration is telling to me,  
 How they drag, drag, drag,  
 The telegraph cable along,

2(U)  
 No little signals are coming to me,  
 2(U)  
 Something has surely gone wrong,  
 And it's broke, broke, broke,  
 What is the cause of it does not transpire,  
 But something has broken the telegraph wire,  
 With the stroke, stroke stroke,  
 Or else they've been pulling too strong,

2(U)  
 Fishes are whispering, what can it be,  
 2(U)

So many hundred miles long,  
For it's strange, strange, strange,  
How they could spin out such durable stuff,  
Lying all wiry, elastic, and tough,  
Without change, change, change,  
In the salt water so strong,

2(U)

There let us leave it for fishes to see,

2(U)

They'll see lots of cables ere long,  
For we'll twine, twine, twine,  
And spin a new cable and try it again,  
And settle our bargains of cotton and grain,  
With a line, line, line-  
A little line that will never go wrong.

24. see D. de Cogan, *Dr E.O.W. Whitehouse and the 1858 trans-Atlantic cable*, History of Technology, Vol. 10, (1985), pp 1 - 15.

**Appendix (with Graves' original footnotes)**

Christmas Greetings 1879

A telegraphic message { From F. Perry, Heart's Content  
to J. Graves, Valentia

Full thirteen years hath Phoebus's cart gone round  
This icebound shore and Paddy's Emerald ground  
Since each near each in fleshy guise could stand  
And grasp at Christmas time the friendly hand.  
Still are we not much better off than some  
Who no such link enjoy 'twixt them and home  
Through it our hearty greetings are conveyed  
And warmest wishes for "Merry Christmas" made.  
Let's hope the festive season may be spent  
Right gladly at VA and Heart's Content

Telegraphic reply { From J. Graves, Valentia  
to F. Perry, Heart's Content

I thank thee friend, for thine effusion meet  
And with my staff I thee and thine now greet,  
With my best wishes for the coming year  
Which now is drawing on so very near.  
May it to you and us, to your's and our's bring health  
And ev'ry happiness- a modicum of wealth.  
May we from dire afflictions be set free  
And our connections still unbroken be.  
And may our Friendship still in heart and soul  
Be constant as the magnet to the pole

Christmas Greetings 1880

A telegraphic message { From F. Perry, Heart's Content  
to J. Graves, Valentia

"Tis only once a year" was urged by those  
Who, oystershell in hand once stirred the clothes  
Of passers by. So I too once a year  
Would strive to offer words of Christmas cheer  
And hopes of Christmas joy to one who oft  
Kept dreary watch on couch reverse of soft  
Near "churchyard cold and grim". Full many a day  
Has come and gone since then. The long array  
Of friends we knew, where are they? Scattered wide  
Like fragile straws on river's swollen tide  
Or boys engag'd in lov'd tho' wrongful play  
Dispers'd abroad 'fore "Bobbie's" sov'reign sway.  
Still you and I, p'raps ne'er to meet again  
Hold sweet communion by th'Electric chain.  
May this remain till, tired of active life  
We seek repose beyond ignoble strife;  
Not in the alms house or blank union cold,  
Both fill'd with hope of endless bliss untold

Telegraphic reply { From J. Graves, Valentia  
to F. Perry, Heart's Content

I well nigh had forgot the usual rhyme  
Which are we wont t'exchange at Christmas time  
The "grotto boys" in August, shell in hand  
Amuse themselves throughout our native land  
Their pockets copper-lined "but once a year"  
Provide the sweets their little hearts to cheer:  
But we by copper lines beyond their Ken  
each other greet, and hope to do again.  
These fourteen years all full of hope and fear  
Have we exchang'd our greetings year by year  
A few more revolutions of this orb  
May you and I and many more absorb  
Yet still I trust that we may live t'enjoy  
A few years' ease in peace without alloy.  
Old "Merrie Christmas" once again appears  
Far greener here than 'twas in bygone years;  
Perhaps not so in your far distant isle  
Yet let the "Yule-log" cheer you up awhile.  
Accept my hearty wish that you may spend  
Many another Christmas 'ere your end.  
My best congratulations pray receive  
Convey'd by wire this merry /Christmas Eve.

## Christmas Greetings 1881

A telegraphic message { From F. Perry, Heart's Content  
to J. Graves, Valentia

"Tis here again- Old Christmas ever new,  
Shall I wits brush up, and strive to woo  
The fickle muse? I've done it once before  
It may be once too often - yet though poor  
The effort, it may serve to keep alive  
The friendship of long years - say twenty five.  
The years roll on -ah me! why do they roll?  
Transform snow white the heads once black as coal,  
Remove the lustre from the eye so bright  
And portly make the form, erstwhile so slight!  
Regrets are vain:- there's one I cannot hide  
For that brave link now sever'd on the tide  
of Erin's strand\* . Its voice is dumb - no more  
Responsive to our call it flashes o'er  
Great Ocean's space, the signal that we'd love  
That zinc and copper both to earth should move;  
Most valued cable of the goodly three†  
Mourned in this golden hour of jubilee!  
Oh valiant "Gamecock" hasten to our aid#  
Receive the guerdon waiting to be paid  
For restoration. Let fair wind and weather  
Go hand in hand to help the strong endeavour  
And "Seventy -four" its lease of life renew  
To be a bond of strength 'twixt us and you.  
Another word, to wish that all may share  
The best of Christmas joys and Christmas fare  
May peace and plenty evermore abound  
With thankful Heart's Contented minds be found

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\* The 1874 Cable was broken during a violent gale off the Irish coast on 23 November 1881.

† The three cables of 1873, 1874 and 1880

# The steamtug "Gamecock" was then on its way to repair the 1874 cable

## Christmas Greetings 1881

Telegraphic reply { From J. Graves, Valentia  
to F. Perry, Heart's Content

Old Father Time once more has brought us round  
To that same season where we oft have found  
'Midst varied outside scenes of white or green  
The Holly and the Ivy evergreen,  
And whilst of yore 'twas thought enough to say  
"The Compliments of the Season" on this day  
When friend met friend 'tis now th'established rule  
Artistic cards to send at time of Yule.  
This custom has of late so much increased  
That scarce a family circle at its feast  
Is minus quite "a pack of cards" to cheer  
Not only "Christmas" but the "Bright New Year".  
Such cards, however, are not more sincere  
Than verbal greetings for a "Happy Year".  
The custom has to many brought the means  
To buy a "Christmas Goose" and evergreens.  
Our "missing link" now lying off the shore  
Of Erin's isle we'll soon I hope restore.  
The "Gamecock" on the way must breast the wave  
And strive, 'ere long, this missing link to save;  
And if we get our "Seventy-four" this year\*  
We then may shout with glee "Brave Chanticleer"

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\* The Gamecock assisted ultimately by the Kangaroo completed the repairs to the 1874 cable on 5th February 1882

## Christmas Greetings 1882

A telegraphic message { From J. Graves, Valentia  
to F. Perry, Heart's Content

When last the Yule log blaz'e upon the hearth  
The "Gamecock" steamed along her briny path:  
[If path there be upon the trackless main  
Where no one ever sees their track again]  
And, subsequently helped by "Kangaroo"  
Put "seventy-four" O.K. 'twixt me and you.  
Since then we've worked - more opposition met-  
More "pooling of receipts" - less share we get.  
How far this subdivision is politic  
We'll not discuss but leave that to the critic.  
Once more I'm spar'd a Christmas Day to spend  
So I to you congratulations send;  
And trust that we may both good health enjoy  
our hands and minds still actively employ,  
And thus fulfill our mission here below  
'Ere we upon our heavenward course shall go!  
Tis scarce a time on subjects dull to dwell  
To look around and see what names we miss  
'Mongst those we knew a few years back from this.  
Where now have Wortley<sup>1</sup> , Stewart<sup>2</sup> , Lampson<sup>3</sup> gone?  
Where too are Saward<sup>4</sup> , Glass<sup>5</sup> and Hamilton<sup>6</sup> ;  
McCurley<sup>7</sup> , Watlock<sup>8</sup> , Sanger<sup>9</sup> , Hockin<sup>10</sup> too,  
Laws<sup>11</sup> , Medley<sup>12</sup> , Crookes<sup>13</sup> and Henley<sup>14</sup> ? All we knew  
But know no more except through mem'ry keen  
Reminding us of what they all have been  
I nearly had forgot our Captains bold,  
Poor Tidmarsh<sup>15</sup> , Welch<sup>16</sup> and Blacklock<sup>17</sup> - all are cold

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| <sup>1</sup> Hon James Stuart Wortley        | Chairman of the Atlantic Telegraph Co  |
| <sup>2</sup> Charles Stewart Esq             | Chairman of the Anglo American Telegraph Co, (died in the Boardroom)   |
| <sup>3</sup> Sir Curtis Miranda Lampson      | Vice Chairman of the Atlantic Telegraph Co   |
| <sup>4</sup> George Saward Esq               | Secretary of the Atlantic Telegraph Co   |
| <sup>5</sup> Sir Richard Glass               | Director of the Telegraph Construction and Maintenance Co  |
| <sup>6</sup> Capt. Augustus Terrick Hamilton | Director of the Atlantic and Anglo American Telegraph Co.  |
| <sup>7</sup> James McCurley                  | Asst. Secretary of the Atlantic Telegraph Co   |
| <sup>8</sup> Benjamin Watlock Esq            | Engineer, Magnetic Telegraph Co  |
| <sup>9</sup> William H. Sanger               | Superintendent, magnetic Telegraph Co.   |
| <sup>10</sup> Charles Hockin Esq             | Electrician and Mathematician (Clarke, Forde & Taylor Consulting Engineers)  |
| <sup>11</sup> Joseph C. Laws Esq             | Electrician and Mathematician (Telegraph Construction and Maintenance Co)  |
| <sup>12</sup> William Medley Esq             | do (died of fever in Cuba while laying Florida - Havana cable)   |
| <sup>13</sup> Arthur Crookes Esq             | do do  |
| <sup>14</sup> William T. Henley Esq          | Cable Manufacturer, North Woolwich   |
| <sup>15</sup> Capt. James Tidmarsh           | Lost in "Robert Lowe" sunk off Cape St. Mary NF  |
| <sup>16</sup> Capt William E. Welch          | Died between Halifax NS and Bermuda while on trip to recruit his health after being nearly drowned in Halifax Harbour by boat capsizing.                           |
| <sup>17</sup> Capt. James Blacklock          | with whom I worked 21/2 years in the North Sea and also crossed the Atlantic in 1870 on a repairing expedition to Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and St Pierre-Miquelon |

telegraphic reply { From F. Perry, Heart's Content  
to J. Graves, Valentia

A day behind the fair- Tis ill of me  
To be so late- but "better late . . ." oh, see  
How prone one is e'en to use in rhyme  
Those well-worn saws of pas and bygone time.  
"Old Father Time" mows on; his sickle keen  
Knows no repose: no rest from toil is seen:  
Another Christmas we've been spared to meet  
Another word in season sent to greet.  
Are we not thankful? Yes I trow we are  
For health and strength t'engage in Life's stern war.  
This tree of ours- this Telegraphic Tree  
Extends its branches far o'er land and sea.  
Full many a leaf has fall'n, still we remain  
And friends are parted ne'er to meet again.  
All praise and honour be to those whose pain  
made doubts resolve and hidden places plain.  
In fancy's eye tonight again we view  
The scenes so well recall'd by us and you  
The playhouse doors besieged by old and young  
The treat expectant rais'd 'mongst all the throng.  
George Barnwell first, then glorious to behold  
The gorgeous Pantomime- its wealth untold-  
Where fairy Sprite, and wrinkled pantaloons  
Hobgoblin, Elf and laugh-inspiring Clown  
Conspire in each and ev'ry part to blend  
Th' excitement well maintained until the end.  
But plays are banish'd, p'rhaps the last we've seen  
Yet still we pray, "Lord Keep our Mem'ry Green"-

Christmas Greetings 1883

A telegraphic message { From J. Graves, Valentia  
to F. Perry, Heart's Content

So here we are again my long tried friend  
Once more our wonted greetings spar'd to send  
Across the Ocean, to the other side  
At this most festive season, Christmas-tide.  
Once more the Yule-log blazes on the hearth  
And one more year we've toiled along the path  
Marked out by Duty. Still that path pursue;  
No matter what the trouble hid from view  
'Twill show itself too soon, if come it must:  
Let's live in hope, be firm and true and just:  
Despise the world's vain charms; nor ever dread  
That seed of righteous men shall beg their bread.  
Let conscience be our guide in all our ways,  
Nor fear the censure, nor court the praise:  
Suffice to know that no more party feeling  
Can e'er be found into our actions stealing.  
Raise high the standard of a spotless name  
And let the world declare or hide its fame!

Upon the deathroll of this year appears  
One name familiar to our earlier years;-  
For who amongst the "Old Electric crew"  
Can say he C.F. Varley never knew?  
Yes, gifted Cromwell, we both knew him well,  
And many vivid tale of him could tell.  
Before the age he liv'd - and much foresaw,  
Conclusions drew which years it took to draw  
From other minds of less perceptive ken  
E'en though they too were reckon'd clever men.  
Peace to his dust, his work and toil are done  
Trace faults in sand - no man can boast of none:  
But 'blazoned on the scientific page  
The works of Varley shine from age to age!

Sir William Siemens and some other names  
Have also gone and left respective claims  
On us, for having undertook the cause  
Of searching out the depths of Nature's laws  
And now, my friend we'll drink with right good will  
Each other's health: - and may next Christmas still  
Find each of us both able then to say,  
"Rejoice, Old Friend, 'tis Merry Christmas Day"

## The Reply

From F. Perry, Heart's Content  
to J. Graves, Valentia

"A Merry Christmas!" Oft in byegone time  
Our words of greeting have been cloth'd in rhyme  
Though weak my effort, still the aim's sincere  
To add one tribute to the passing year,  
And yet again the fervent hope express  
That peace and concord too may ne'er grow less  
"A Merry Christmas"- how the wish conveys  
Full many a dream of long departed days

## Christmas Greetings 1884

A telegraphic message { From F. Perry, Heart's Content  
to J. Graves, Valentia

The good old season Christmas comes again,  
The time of mirth, good fellowship to men,  
The time of 'change of words 'twixt you and me.  
Deem it not vain, my good old friend, that I  
A poetaster of the deepest dye  
Essay once more in weak and halting rhyme  
to add a passing tribute to the time.

Oh, Chronos! why so swift your course pursue  
One little moment's rest for us and you -  
Will you not yield a respite brief? But no,  
Like Anglo Stock, still down and down we go.  
'Tis sad to feel with each succeeding year  
That strength and ardour must disappear,  
Still happy he who saves whate'er he can  
And pays his "Monthly Premiums" like a man.

In Fancy's eye, again I seem to view  
The face and form of those whom long we knew.  
For thirty years they stemmed this graphic tide,  
But now, alas, their pens are laid aside;  
No more responsive to their varying sway  
Shall "Mirror" flash, or "Siphon" mark its way:  
No more responsive shall their laugh go round  
When talk and tale of byegone times resound:  
Their missions done - their lives on earth are o'er  
And we are speeding to that distant shore  
Where all things dark shall be distinct and plain,  
Where we in spirit hope to meet again!

And now, old friend, away to festive cheer,  
Let capon fat, and unctious goose appear;  
Let hand join hand and prayers on high ascend  
For weal and welfare of each absent friend.

## The Reply

From J. Graves,      Valentia  
to     F. Perry,      Heart's Content

My dear old friend you must I pray excuse  
These tardy lines - their lateness not abuse -  
For what with "Christmas Cards and business too  
I well - nigh had o'erlook'd my rhyme to you:  
My rhyme by which in years that have gone by  
I've poorly tried t'enlist your sympathy.  
This year you have forestall'd me with your pen  
And put me in a corner. Still I ken  
I'll try to write a line and thus convey  
My thoughts to you and yours this Christmas Day  
Old Sol is low and scarcely scales the hill,  
His beams are barely felt - the wind is chill -  
But thanks to Him from whom all good things come  
We've food and drink and shelter in our home  
A dream p'rhaps pregnant with celestial fire  
To may a youthful artist of the wire.  
Ambition still we know is very well  
Unfortunately though it will not sell  
Except perhaps, the poor unlucky wig'ht  
Who hastes to win a glorious future by't  
These are the days when rich appointment, far  
is sought , by many a youngster as a star;  
A guiding star indeed, that leads to fame,  
But oft, alas, it proves an empty name.  
The sayings - thought much hackney'd - are most true  
That "Distance lends enchantment to the view",  
And "All that glitters is not gold", 'tis said,  
Both well advanced by many a grizzled head<sup>#</sup> .  
Tis pleasant to recall the dear old time,  
The day of youth, and not too far the prime:  
Would they had linger'd - but hence the foolish hope,  
The youngest will grow old, but give him rope.  
The days of thrift - brisk'd by the quarter -  
Scoff'd at the desk - half-a-pint of porter -  
And other dainties - needless here to speak,  
For who is counted rich on fourteen coins a week<sup>†</sup> ?  
Farewell, my good old friend, your words sink down  
Deep in the heart of one who's bidden the Town  
A long adieu. If on the cards 'tis set  
To meet again, "We may be happy yet"  
We winners of the bread, still live to toil  
While others have "put off the mortal coil"  
The lesson taught us may we lay to heart  
And be prepared to go when called to part.  
But, as of old, 'tis meet that while here we stay  
To try and happy be on Christmas Day.  
'Midst right good cheers and music to its end  
May you and yours a "Merry Christmas" spend.

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<sup>#</sup> Reference is here made to numerous young cable clerks leaving for foreign service in other companies

<sup>†</sup> Fourteen shillings a week at Lothbury London

## Christmas Greetings 1885

A telegraphic message { From J. Graves, Valentia  
to F. Perry, Heart's Content

The festive season once again comes around  
And joyful village bells once more resound;  
Reminding us that Christmas Day once more  
has come to cheer us as it did of yore.  
So call all men to prayers let church bells ring  
And boys and girls and men and women sing  
To celebrate the praise of him who came  
To Earth from Heaven for us to suffer shame.  
The 'round the festive board let's take a seat  
Thankful to find we've food enough to eat;  
Our goblets let us fill and like our sires  
Enjoy ourselves around our Christmas fires.  
With port or sherry or more fiery stuff,  
Let's toast and drink, till each has had enough:  
Let none forget, enough may prove a feast  
Too much, au contraire, only show the beast.  
Our grandsires gloated o'er their Christmas fare  
Whilst elderwine was brought from out the hoard  
To join with stronger drinks upon the board.  
But we are less romantic in this age  
And Education Boards make us more sage  
The duties of our lives much weightier are  
Than those of grandsires - aye, 'tis true - by far.  
But while we toil with things beyond the ken  
Of little children - germs of future men -  
We adults must not quite forget that they  
Enjoy amusements on their Christmas Day  
The Christmas Tree delights their childish eyes  
And raises hopes that each may win a prize.  
The Magic Lantern too, ne'er fails to please  
Till tears are shed their hearty laughs to ease  
Let us, then, one and all, each yule provide  
That all may join at Merry Christmas - tide  
Both young and old in happiness to spend  
This Day of days each year until our end.

## The Reply

From F. Perry, Heart's Content  
to J. Graves, Valentia

The page was almost blank, Today I said,  
"No more I'll harp upon this string, for dead  
And silent lies the muse within my heart.  
Then words which oft in rhyme had been express'd  
Must now to sober prose perforce descend  
When I to you my Christmas greeting send"-  
But no, in verse I'll try once more to gain  
Your 'tentive ear thout effort prove in vain.

A secret for your ear; - you'll feel it hard  
For rhymes like ours that doggrel is the word.  
Oh, pity 'tis true, our friend of Pierre  
Cries, "Send me your doggrel for present year"  
A cruel name, although alas, I know it  
Our verses lack the stamp of fleshless poet.  
Albeit bald and bare, the aim's sincere,  
Friend to greet friend 'ere now the dying year.  
'Ere yet the present fleeting now so fast  
Lies side by side with those of musty past.  
Grieve not, old friend, for days when life was young  
All Couleur rose as hath been said or sung  
For life to most assumes a darker hue  
Though not too sad I trust to me and you.

Return we to "our mutttons" - the boundless feast  
The good old cheer of toothsome bird or beast  
Let each and all with thankful hearts employ  
The best of Christmas feeling, Christmas joy.

Christmas Greetings 1886

A telegraphic message { From F. Perry, Heart's Content  
to J. Graves, Valentia

A word in season, let me once more strive  
To keep th'old fashioned custom still alive,  
Though weak my words, believe the aim's sincere  
To add one tribute to the dying year.  
Full twenty now have fled since you and I  
Have grasped each others hand materially  
Full twenty dozen moons have wax'd and wan'd  
Since Erin's Isle and 'Foundland's shore were gain'd.  
Let us not mourn the years, for still they say  
Each canine has his own peculiar day.  
And this our day who knows how brief may be  
For in the sere and yellow leaf are we  
Poor Anglo! hard thy lot with meagre gains  
Is this the guerdons of unceasing pains?  
That pioneer of 'lantic wire to be  
Thy fate should prove continued poverty;  
With empty coffers and the downward tend  
What holder now expects a dividend?  
Regrets are vain - they keep but ill accord  
With Christmas season and the loving word  
Extended far and wide within our ken  
Of peace on Earth, good fellowship to men  
So may our hearts right warm and thankful be  
To gladden this golden hour of Jubilee.

## The Reply

From J. Graves,      Valentia  
to     F. Perry,      Heart's Content

While sitting at the table well supplied  
Surrounded by my friends this Christmas - tide  
Your missive came and cheered us one and all  
Both old and young and also great and small.  
'Tis nice to know that those so far away  
Are with us still in spirit on this day  
Accept I pray my heartfelt wishes too  
That this day ma a comfort be to you  
Too well 'tis known that those who've delv'd and spun  
have year by year by others been outdone  
That 'holders who the pioneers have been  
Must suffer now, since War is on the scene  
How long 'twill last we none of us can tell  
Financiers know not if to buy or sell  
Tis hard that one long purse should thus destroy  
The hopes of thousands and their future cloy.  
The "Minia" now with Captain Trott is here  
Let's hope our lines O.K. will soon appear.  
Here's to your health - may future years still be  
As prosperous as the past to you and me