

HOW SHIPS ARE SPOKEN AT SEA.

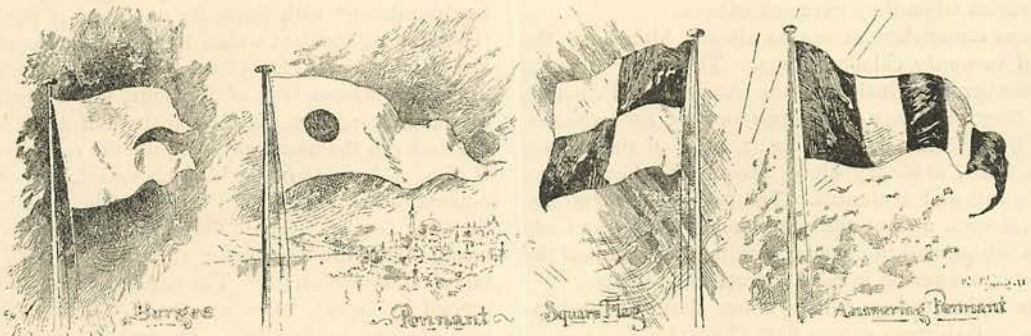


FIG. 1.



NOT least among the lasting glories of the Victorian era is the almost absolute perfection attained in the system by which messages are rapidly and intelligibly signalled by ships passing each other at sea. What, at first blush, might appear a problem insolvable

by human ingenuity has at length, by dint of patient and painstaking investigation, been completely and satisfactorily worked out. True is it in this, as in all things worth the having, that "Rome was not built in a day." The ordinary observer, eloquent of the extraordinary facilities effected on *terra firma* by the agencies of the electric wire and the modern and magical telephone, is perhaps apt to quite overlook the almost equally effective triumphs of invention on the great thoroughfares of the ocean. Distance is bridged by the telegraph, but the non-existence of the telegraph is no obstacle to the transmission of confidences from ship to ship passing each other at sea.

It is thirty years since "The International Code of Signals" was finally adopted by the great maritime Powers. A Committee, which had been appointed by the Board of Trade in July, 1855, "to inquire into and report upon the subject of a Code of Signals to be used at sea," after a sitting of a little over a year, made their important presentment on September 24th, 1856. The valuable suggestions of the Committee were embodied, and in April, 1857, published in the Book of Directions, which is at this day in universal use, and printed in ten different languages.

England having set the initiative, no less than fifteen nations followed suit, and decided to adopt this most perfect and inestimable Code, which thus received the vast consensus of approval of the whole nautical world. Previous to the conception of the International Code,

there existed a multiplicity of codes in a corresponding variety of languages, thus creating a confusion at sea only rivalled by that which obtained upon land at the disastrous building of the Tower of Babel. Among all these contending codes, the most notable was "Marryat's." It may not be generally known that the inventor whose name is associated with this

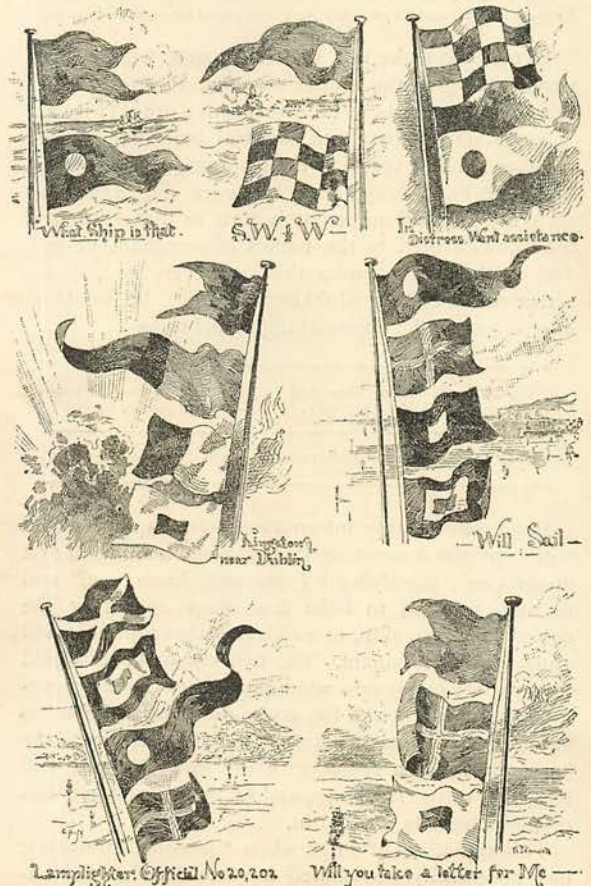


FIG. 2.

particular system of signalling is one and the same individual with the celebrated author of "Peter Simple," "Midshipman Easy," and other stories, which gave such unbounded delight to the men of this generation when they were schoolboys.

Ships are spoken at sea, as already hinted, by the aid of variously coloured flags. These are eighteen in number (not including the Answering Pennant), each flag representing a consonant of the alphabet, and by a combination of 2, 3, or 4 of these flags in a hoist, arbitrary signs are made which represent words and sentences. The flags have three distinct shapes, and at the commencement of the Code Book are printed in colours, with the consonant of the alphabet answering to each flag attached thereto.

The eighteen flags consist of one Burgee, four Pennants, and thirteen square flags (Fig. 1).

By the arrangement of the Burgee, Pennants, and square flags, *specially distinctive characters* are given to the signals, thus :

In Signals made with *Two Signs*—
The *Burgee* uppermost represents . . . *Attention* Signals.
A *Pennant* uppermost " " " " *Compass* Signals.
And a *square Flag* uppermost represents *Danger* Signals.

In Signals composed of *Four Signs*—
The *Burgee* uppermost represents . . . *Geographical*.
A *Pennant* uppermost " " " " *Vocabulary*.
And a *square Flag* uppermost represents . . . *Ships' Names*.

Three-flag signals are Universal, and express Latitude, Longitude, Time, Numeral, and all ordinary signals required for communications.

In order to make this matter clear, it will be well, perhaps, to give the reader an illustration of each of the foregoing hoists in their respective order (Fig. 2).

A captain, by the aid of powerful binocular glasses, sighting another vessel in the distance, and observing, say, *four* flags flying with a *square flag* uppermost (N V B Q), would immediately turn to that section of the Code devoted to the names of merchant vessels, and as the letters under this and every section are arranged in strictly alphabetical order, he would at once discover the approaching vessel to be

Signal Letters.	Name of Ship, and Port of Registry.	Reg. Tonnage.	Horse-power.	Official No.
N V B Q	<i>Germanic</i> of Liverpool..	3,150	760	70,932

Possessed of this information, the captain would "run up" the Answering Pennant (see last flag of first illustration), signifying "I see and know you," and in turn proceed to hoist four flags indicating the name of his own ship, to which the other captain would reply with the Pennant. The two commanders would then denote by signals what ports they were respectively from and bound for, and number of days out on voyage. These particulars would be entered in the log-books of each vessel, with the exact latitude and longitude of the *rencontre*, and on arrival at their destinations be duly handed in.

This signalling of ships when "passing," though it has necessarily occasioned a somewhat lengthy explanation, only occupies a brief time to perform, and,

as a rule in ordinary circumstances, this is all the "speaking" that takes place.

That it is absolutely necessary to "speak" correctly on board ship, however the "Queen's English" may be "murdered" with impunity on shore, is proved by the following incident which happened at Cape Town last November. The *Clan Gordon* (s.), having on board seventy-one tons of dynamite, was compelled to discharge cargo in the Bay, instead of unloading in the docks in the usual way. While the captain of the R.M.S. *Athenian* was docking his vessel, he suddenly noticed the two flags "N P" run up the masthead of the *Clan Gordon*. These flags, according to the Code, mean "The fire is gaining rapidly; we wish to be taken off immediately." The captain of the *Athenian* replied by signal, "Get up steam," then proceeded with two tugs to the scene. On arriving on board the *Clan Gordon* everything appeared in perfect order, and nobody was more surprised than the quartermaster, who had placed the flags upside-down—"P N" being the signal for a tug, and "N P" that the ship was on fire. The captain of the *Athenian* imme-

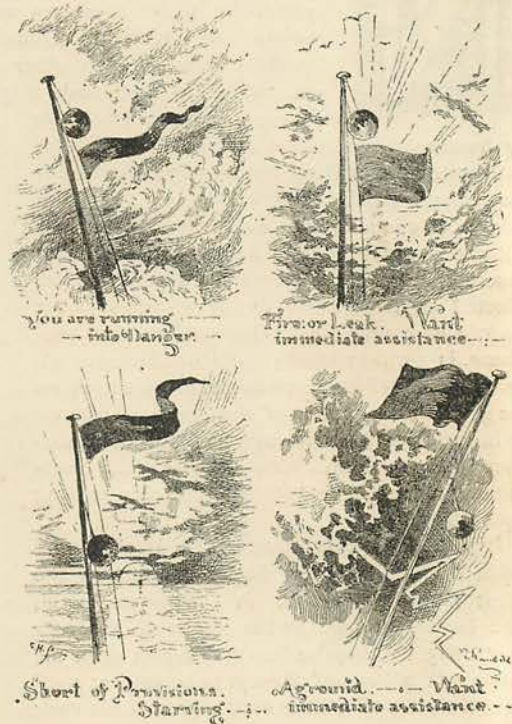


FIG. 3.

diately returned to the shore, and explained to the excited crowd that had gathered at the pier-head "that a slight mistake in marine signalling had been made."

It goes without saying that the meaning of each signal is given in the Code Book opposite the letters represented by the flags shown at the masthead. A glance at the following table will show the marvellous number of distinct signals which, by Permutations, ten or more flags, in hoists of from two to four signs, are capable of forming:—

Single Signs not reckoned.	With 10.	With 11.	With 12.	With 13.	With 14.	With 15.
In Hoist of } 2 Signs }	90	110	132	156	182	210
Ditto 3	720	990	1,320	1,716	2,184	2,730
Ditto 4	5,040	7,920	11,880	17,160	24,024	32,760
Ditto 5	30,240	55,440	95,040	154,440	240,240	360,360
Total with } 2, 3, 4, and 5 }	36,100	64,460	108,372			
Total with } 2, 3, and 4 }				19,032	26,390	35,700

Single Signs not reckoned.	With 16.	With 17.	With 18.	With 19.	With 20.
In Hoist of } 2 Signs }	240	272	306	342	380
Ditto 3	3,360	4,080	4,896	5,814	6,840
Ditto 4	43,680	57,120	73,440	93,624	116,280
Ditto 5	480,480	742,560	1,028,160	1,395,360	1,860,480
Total with } 2, 3, 4, and 5 }					
Total with } 2, 3, and 4 }	47,280	61,472	78,642	99,180	123,500

It will thus be seen that the Committee of 1856, in fixing on eighteen flags, provided for no less than 70,000 distinct signals, with a possible extension to 78,642, each signal consisting of a hoist of not more than *four flags*; and this provision (as experience has testified) has proved amply sufficient. To counteract the obvious difficulty of *colours* of signals not being discernible by reason of distance or hazy weather, a Code of Distant Correspondence is inserted in the book, and *shapes* of signals are substituted, of which we give examples (Fig. 3).

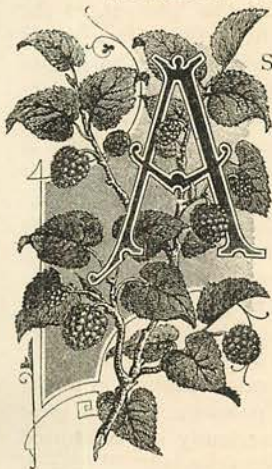
There is one thought that seems to arise from our brief consideration of this interesting subject. Our country is popularly designated "The Mistress of the Sea." The poet Campbell has sung :

" Her march is on the mountain wave,
Her home is on the deep."

It appears to us that the best practical evidence of this assertion may be discovered, not alone and solely in the victory achieved at the Baltic or Trafalgar, but in the more peaceful and enduring conquest by which, in 1857, she gave a common language to the countless thousands of all peoples and tongues "that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters."

RICHARD HOLLAND.

WILLIAM EDWARD FORSTER, STATESMAN AND PHILANTHROPIST.



As a man's death dissolves from our memories the acid of antagonism—be it personal, political, or religious—so a good memoir enables non-combatants and the world at large to get a clear view of the totality of a man's character. The one purifies recollection, the other rounds off judgment. Mr. Reid's story of Mr. Forster's life,* told, "so far as may be, in Mr. Forster's own words," enables us to reconcile conflicting theories, to follow the evolution of a singular character, to come to close grip and quiet converse with a powerful, storm-loving, and yet tender-hearted man. It is not a history so much as a panorama—full of battle and pathos, thunder amid the crags, and gleams of sylvan beauty and pastoral peace.

Mr. Forster was not a Yorkshireman by birth, but he was "more a Yorkshireman than the Yorkshiremen themselves." There was Northern blood in his veins; and when he had made his first trip to the

* "The Life of the Right Honourable William Edward Forster," by T. Wemyss Reid. Two Vols. Chapman and Hall.

North, and studied the hardy folk there, and learnt to love them for their grit and grip, he seems to have said to himself, "These are my own people, and amongst them I will dwell." Norwich had been lazy and sleepy; in the North all was vividness and activity. He was engaged in wool-sorting in the Pease mills at Darlington, and he wrote in his diary, "Employment, dirty drudgery; standing, tiring; bear it heroically, because I hope it will do me good." He had previously assisted his famous uncle, Mr. Fowell Buxton, in preparing his anti-slavery speeches, developed an interest in questions touching native races, and settled in his own mind what he should like to be. When twelve years old he had said, "I shall take to the law, because in that line I may get into Parliament." However, it was commerce that claimed him, and as a man of commerce that he entered public life. His father opposed him in several ways, notably when he desired to be his uncle's secretary; and his uncle was equally hostile to his wish to join the ill-fated Niger expedition.

Again, when Forster consulted his uncle about entering a manufacturing concern where slave-grown produce was manufactured, the answer came, "Pray it out." He did not join it. His interest in the anti-slavery question was intense. The Northern Slave Trade was a favourite subject with him, and he compiled facts and statistics concerning it with great