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# NEW YORK-LONDON PHONE HAS BUSY FIRST MONTH

## People From This City to Chicago and Northward to Canada Talk Across the Atlantic on a Variety of Topics—Connections Made With Surprising Speed

By JAMES C. YOUNG.

WHEN a busy New Yorker picks up the telephone receiver and asks for London—yes, operator, Picadilly 2215, London—it usually takes about five minutes to put his connection through. Between noon and one o'clock he may have to wait a few minutes longer. That is the hardest time of the day. There is nothing wrong about the apparatus, but it is tea time on the Strand.

Not only New Yorkers but Americans in all the broad territory from Washington to Chicago and northward to Canada are calling London with a regularity that has made the transatlantic telephone an impressive success. Today every telephone in England, Scotland and Wales may be reached. Before many weeks have elapsed the whole United States will be open to ocean communication.

It is a bit eerie to stand before a switchboard in the Walker Street exchange and hear voices across the Atlantic. The switchboard differs in no way from hundreds of others. A white ticket over the instrument merely notes "London," just as if it were "Boston" or "Yonkers."

Getting a telephone number 3,500 miles away sometimes is easier than getting a number here. Perhaps there are more numbers to go around and fewer callers. In any event, the speed of service between America and the British Isles is unbelievably fast. The man seeking a connection scarcely has time to light a cigar and decide what he is going to say before London replies. But a great organization works swiftly between the call and the answer.

### "Long Distance" on the Trail.

The subscriber, sitting in his Broad Street office, asks for "Long Distance" and requests a London number. Perhaps he doesn't know the number. Usually he fails, but supplies the name and street address. "Long Distance" tells him to wait a minute and looks up the name in a London telephone directory, conveniently at hand. If the number appears, all is well. But it may be a new telephone, not yet listed in the London book; or an old telephone discontinued for some time. In either case "Long Distance" tries to make sure of the name and address. At least the name can be had.

But the subscriber may say that his friend overseas has no telephone, so far as he knows. Will "Long Distance" please have the London man called on his neighbor's telephone, a block away? "Long Distance" can and will. Should there be no friendly neighbor, "Long Distance" will send a messenger. Today, it would be difficult for any person in the British Isles or the territory opened in America to escape a transoceanic telephone call. He must have left for parts unknown to defeat the vigilant "Long Distance."

The typical connection goes through in five minutes. The New York and London operators are in constant communication. There are no ringing of bells and flashing of signals to indicate calls. The operators sit with headpieces adjusted, separated by 2,500 miles, but instantly responsive to the slightest wish. From 8 in the morning to 1 in the afternoon, or from 1 in the afternoon to 6 in London, these operators maintain a strange comradeship across a wide stretch of the world. Already they have become fast friends. Doubtless they know the new styles in Spring hats over there and over here. Each of them hopes to cross the ocean "one of these days" and have a real chat with the other.

### The Human Elements.

"Of course, I never asked," said the operator here, "but I imagine my friend in London has blue eyes and blond hair. She is probably tall, too. Certainly she has a fine, clear voice; clear as a bell all the time, and I have learned how she pronounces the ordinary words. Seems as if I had known her for years."

Here is a unique friendship, the first of its kind in world radiophone communication. Such an understanding between the "human elements" cannot fail to expedite a call from the Broad Street office. The moment this call is received a number of interesting events take place. After all the necessary references, "Long Distance" hails her friend overseas in a brisk, businesslike voice, pitched in a pleasant, matter-of-fact key.

"Hello, London," she says, "I want so and so."

Each time a call is put through more than \$5,000,000 of apparatus comes into use. At present there is just one "ethereal circuit" and only one conversation can be held at a time. Ordinarily the vibrations are carried on wave lengths of 5,000 meters, but there is an auxiliary service on twenty-two meter waves should disturbances interfere with conversation.

So far static interruption has been slight. The opening day of Jan. 7 was the most troublesome of all. But there is some interruption practically every hour. Until the vast problem of static control has been solved it will be impossible to guard against the grating noises familiar to radio users. It should be said that they are no worse during a transoceanic conversation than the noises of a cheap radio set tuned in with a local concert. Occasionally words are lost and the thread of discussion is broken. But the telephone company plays fair with the subscriber. On the instant that he begins speaking a confidential operator measures the time of his call, stopwatch in hand. When static in-

terferes for twenty seconds she notes the allowance. Five minutes at the receiver is likely to mean no more than three minutes on the monthly bill.

Transatlantic telephony has two major difficulties—static and the lack of secrecy. The first is a universal problem and doubtless will be minimized if not overcome. As regards the second, anybody with a properly tuned set may listen to conversations across the ocean. The inquisitive need an exceptional set to hear both sides. It is relatively easy to pick up a conversation broadcast from Rocky Point, Long Island, but in order to hear replies a set must be powerful enough to receive the London waves, each one driven by seventy horsepower at the start. In this way the difficulties are largely reduced. Transoceanic discussions have more of privacy than might be expected. It is the radio operators at sea, favored by a position midway between, who may enjoy the gossip of their neighbors on either shore.

### Business Calls First.

Business calls rule above the personal, both in numbers and length of time. The phrase oftenest telephoned across the ocean has been, "Isn't this wonderful?" That seems to be the general conclusion by everybody. Although the telephone company maintains a strict policy of noninterference with subscribers, it has been possible to obtain some idea of conversations from subscribers themselves. In a brief month of usage the new service was used for almost every human need. Messages of love, of necessity, of happiness and achievement have sped over the invisible waves of the air faster than any winged Mercury ever carried them before. Large business transactions have been effected. The transatlantic salesman has made his debut.

"Hello," he says, "this is London. About those woolens. You should buy them now. Latest Australian reports point to a shortage this fall of the best wool. Quality goods will be high. Can we put you down for ten thousand yards, as per those samples? Did you get them all right?"

"Oh, yes, we got the samples," comes the reply, "but your price is too high. I don't believe those reports about a shortage. Anyway, we will take the risk. What's that? A shilling cheaper? Well, that's better. Yes, book us for ten thousand yards."

### How Many Words a Minute?

It costs \$25 a minute to telephone across the ocean and three minutes is the minimum. In some future day we may conceive of a specially trained conversationalist to get all the results possible from the shortest period. The man with a New England or a Southern drawl will have little chance for this job. It is desirable to speak distinctly and to say as much as possible quickly. But not too quickly, or the sounds become confused. No artificial effects are required. The voice that inclines to the deeper register can be heard the best, particularly the musical masculine voice.

Timing calculations have shown that 500 words can be exchanged in three minutes without taxing the capacities of either speaker. Experts have been busy with their pencils to prove that this reduces the cost below day cable tolls. It is certain the salesman has all the advantages of close contact. He can bring his personality to bear and even argue a bit if necessary. Besides it becomes hard to refuse a man an order when he has telephoned from London. There is a human inclination to give him encouragement. According to reports in the press and

discussion in business circles, the "transatlantic sales talk" is likely to become a new factor in world trade. One large consignment of diamonds has been sold in this way. A half-dozen financial transactions have been arranged, one of them for \$25,000,000 worth of bonds. Another notable sale involved crude rubber. There have been newspaper interviews by the radiophone. Prince William of Sweden talked to a Stockholm journalist in London and said he heard the man as plainly as if he had talked across the room.

Among other trades and professions benefited by the telephone is that of the press agent. He has elbowed his way to the fore with urgent messages, incidentally given to the press, from celebrities of every sort.

Trade organizations are making the most of their chance. No longer ago than yesterday, as the yesterdays are counted, American business saw the development of a campaign to "say it with flowers" by wire. That seemed almost the last word in business innovations. There was something essentially flattering in the delivery of a bouquet ordered 1,000 miles away. But it remained for the British Florist Telegraph Delivery Association to send a message by radiophone, requesting colleagues on this side to deliver flowers in its name to President Coolidge.

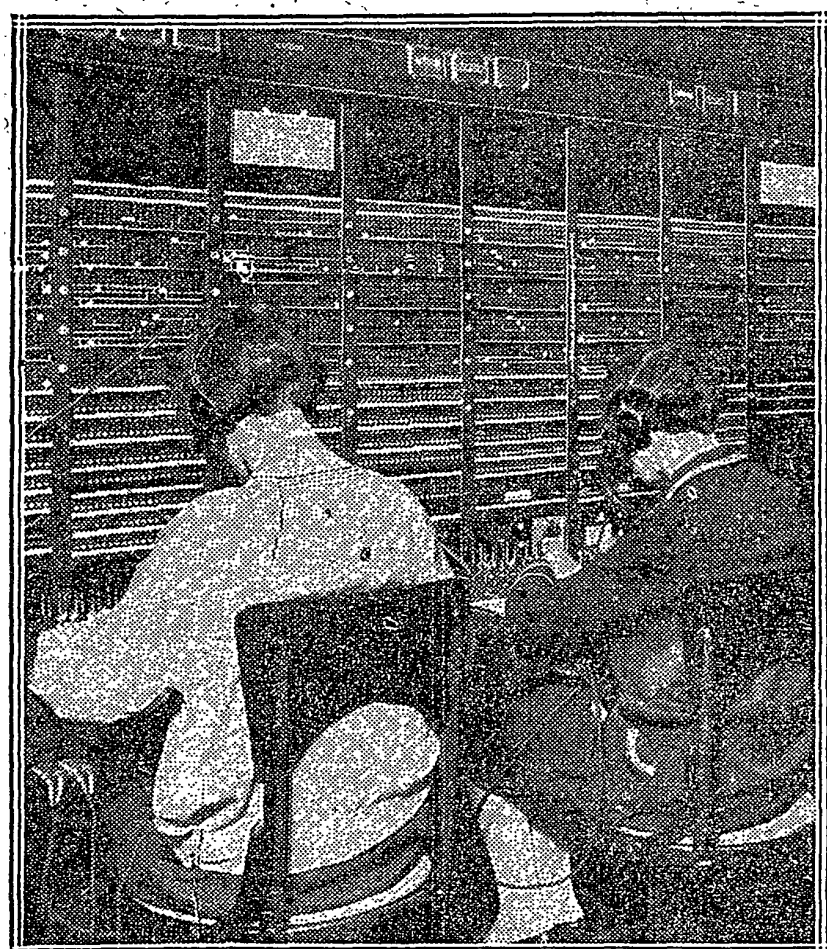
### Infinite Number of Uses.

The social and sporting possibilities of the radiophone must not be passed over lightly. Sir Thomas Lipton, for one, has made an appointment to dine in Yonkers with a friend next month. He also knows that a second friend is to be present, because the first one informed him by transoceanic phone. It may become the custom to issue invitations personally for important gatherings. The possibilities of diplomatic intercourse have not even been touched upon. When the ruler of one nation may talk to another in time of stress it is not unreasonable to hope the radiophone will make war more difficult.

Of more immediate interest, perhaps, were the instructions recently telephoned to London concerning a lesson in the somewhat celebrated dance known as the "Black Bottom." It appears from the papers that the "Black Bottom" has not yet reached London, or at least in only an amateur and insufficient form. So a London teacher called up a New York teacher and for fifteen minutes the New York man instructed the London man. He placed a talking machine close to the instrument and while it played he counted the time. A dancer mounted on an empty box near by stamped her feet to the rhythm. Thus the art of the "Black Bottom" was wafted across the pathless ocean by the magic of the unseen waves. And it cost \$375 as well, the equivalent of fifteen minutes, with \$50 added for the instruction.

There is always something of drama about the transatlantic call. "Long Distance," sitting at her instrument, can pick out the voice that wants London in a hurry. It is quick-spoken and nervous; there is tension at the other end of the telephone wire. So far, business calls have exceeded the personal kind by two to one. They usually begin the moment service is available in the morning here, and last most of the period. Not a single call has gone astray up to this time and there is no record of any complaint that a subscriber failed to complete his message. Perhaps the most interesting of all was sent by a 3-year-old young lady in Buffalo to her father in London. "Hello, Daddy," she said. "The snow is fine."

## HANDLING THE TRANSATLANTIC "TRUNK"



The Operator on the Right Puts Through the Radio Telephone Calls to London, the One on the Left Attends to Local Subscribers.