He was a short, thick-set, ruddy-faced, shrewd-eyed little person, who wore on the left sleeve of his blue jumper two good-conduct badges and the single anchor denoting his "Leading" rate, and on his right the crossed flags denoting his calling, together with a star above and below which signified that he was something of an expert at his job. In short, he was a Leading Signalman of His Majesty's Navy. His name I need not mention. To his friends he sometimes answered to "Nutty," but more often to "Buntin'."

It was always a mystery to me why he had not come to wear the crossed anchors and crown of a Yeoman of Signals, for his qualifications certainly seemed to fit him for promotion to petty-officer's rank, while his habits and character in the last ship in which I knew him were all that could be desired.

It was on board a destroyer that I came to know him really well, and here his work was onerous and responsible. He had his mate, a callow youth who was usually sea-sick in bad weather, and at sea they took 4 hours' turn and turn about on the bridge, each keeping 12 hours' watch out of the twenty-four. But the elder man always seemed to be within sight and hearing, even in his watch below; and the moment anything unusual happened, the moment flags started flapping in the breeze, semaphores started to talk, the younger man became rattled and helpless, and things generally started to go wrong, all at the same moment, "Nutty" came clambering up the ladder to the assistance of his bewildered colleague.

"Call yerself a signalman!" he would growl ferociously. "Give us the glass, an' look sharp an' 'oist the answerin' pendant. You ain't fit to be trusted up 'ere!"

It is to be feared that the youthful one sometimes found his life a misery and a burden, for his mentor was a strict disciplinarian and did not hesitate to bully and goad him into a state of proper activity. But the youngster needed it badly.

"Nutty" seemed to be blessed with the eyes of a lynx, the dexterity of a conjurer, and the tentacles of a decapod. He invariably saw a floating mine, a buoy, or a lightship long before the man whose proper work it was to see it, and at sea, with a telescope to his eye, I often saw him apparently taking in two signals from opposite points of the compass at one and the same moment, with the ship rolling heavily and sheets of spray flying over the bridge.

Somewhere at Portsmouth he had a wife and two children, whom he saw, if he was

lucky, for perhaps seven days every six months. Of his domestic affairs I knew little; but, judging from his letters, which were frequent and voluminous and had to pass through the hands of the ship's censor, he was devoted to his wife and family. I hope they loved him.

Why he was not a Yeoman of Signals I never discovered. Perhaps he had a lurid past. But conjecture is useless. Promotion now would come too late to be of any use to him.

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"Butter, Monkey, Nuts," he rattled off as a light cruiser two miles away suddenly wreathed herself in flags. "Zebra, Charlie, Fanny—Ethel, Donkey, Tommy—Ginger, Percy, Lizzie—— Got that, Bill?"

An Able Seaman, busy with a pencil and a signal pad, signified that he had.

"'Arf a mo', though," resumed the expert, re-levelling his telescope. "I ain't quite certain about that first 'oist. Why on earth they can't 'oist the things clear I dunno!" he grumbled bitterly, for some of the distant flags, as is often the case when the wind is light and uncertain, had coyly wrapped themselves round the halliards and refused to be seen.

Someone on the bridge of the distant cruiser might almost have heard his remark, for as he spoke the halliards began agitatedly to jerk up and down to allow the bunting to flutter clear.

"Ah!" he murmured. "Now we'll get 'em.... Lord!" in a piercing undertone as some misguided humorist in the cruiser's stokehold inconsiderately allowed a puff of black smoke to issue forth from the foremost funnel, completely to obliterate the strings of flags.

The Leading Signalman, not being a thought reader as well as a conjurer, put down his telescope with a grunt until the pall cleared away. "In the first 'oist," he said when the atmosphere had cleared, "in the first 'oist, 'stead o' Fanny put 'Arry.' 'H' for 'Arry."

The A.B. sucked his pencil and acquiesced, while his friend, darting to the after side of the small bridge, hoisted the white and red "Answering Pendant" to show that the signal had been seen and read. He then handed the pad across, on which, in large sprawling capital letters, he had laboriously traced "BMN—ZCF—EDT—GPL."

The "Butter, Monkey, Nuts" business, incomprehensible and startling as it might have been to any outsider, merely emphasised the difference in sound between various letters. B, C, D, E, P, and T; J and K; M and N, among others, are very much alike when pronounced by themselves; but "butter" could not well be mistaken for "Charlie,"

neither could "monkey" be confounded with "nuts."

The Leading Signalman looked out the meaning of the different groups of letters in the book provided for the purpose and showed the result to his commanding officer. Its purport was comparatively unimportant, something about oil-fuel on arrival in harbour.

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But finding out the meaning of those flag signals which he did not know by heart—and he knew most of them—was only a tithe of his duty. He was equally expert at taking in a message spelt out by the whirling arms of a semaphore, arms which waved so rapidly, and whose giddy gyrations were so often well-nigh invisible against a bad background, that his performance savoured of the miraculous. At night, too, he was just as good, for then the frenzied winking of a dim light would convey its meaning just the same. It was a point of honour with him always to get a signal correctly the first time it was made. I never saw him ask for a repetition.

Only twice did I know him to laugh on the bridge, and the first time that occurred was when, through a series of circumstances which need not be entered into here, we nearly came into contact with the next ahead. Such things do happen.

Then it was that the next ahead—he was several years senior to us and a humorist—turned in his wrath and quoted the Bible. "Your attention," his semaphore said, "is drawn to the Gospel according to St. Matthew, chapter 16, verse 23."

We sent for the Bible, looked up the reference, and read: "But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."

The quotation was apt and the Leading Signalman's eyes twinkled. Then I noticed his mouth expanding into a grin, and presently he laughed, a short, explosive sort of laugh rather like the bark of a dog.

But we had our revenge a week later, when our next ahead—he was our friend as well as our senior—nearly collided with a buoy at the entrance to a certain harbour.

"What about the Book of Proverbs?" our semaphore asked. "Chapter 22, verse 28."

"Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set," he must have read. I cannot remember the reply, but the Leading Signalman had laughed once more.

* * * * *

But "Bunting" will never smile again. He went down with his ship on May 31, 1916. The North Sea is his grave and the curling whitecap his tombstone. His epitaph may be written across the sky in a trail of smoke from some passing steamer.