

The Passing of the "Old Days"

By Paul Oard

UP in the static room of the big commercial companies, where on an idle day the operators on shore leave, or waiting for an assignment, swap their yarns of the sea and the wireless, more than one passing regret for "the days that were" may be heard. And while the older men—(who are generally about 25 years of age, and therefore rich in wisdom) exchange their reminiscences, the juniors sit with ears and mouths wide open and drink in their knowledge. The old days of the wireless game have passed, the time when each operator carried his own pet hunk of silicon and perchance a dubious looking pair of phones by which he laid great stress, said stress having been accumulated during a trial in his own amateur station before the itch of the seven seas got into his frame; the days when a fellow who pulled down 4000 miles on some Trans-pacific steamer was given a column of space in the metropolitan dailies, and the head operator even was respectful toward him for an hour or so; the time when a chap would sit up all night aboard some little two by four freighter with a sixty foot aerial, straining his hearing and his peace of mind in an attempt to get press down to the "old man" at breakfast the next morning:—all this has passed, and the old remembrances of the wireless of early days are those passed up by the fellows who have stuck to their keys thru the years.

The enterprising and ambitious juice jerker who stored his phones and silicon away until well out to sea, and then brought them forth and guarded them with loving care from the profane touch of the "second man" has been succeeded by the one who twiddles the knobs of his audion, yawns wearily when a station about 'steen thousand miles roars in and wonders what the deuce is the matter with P O Z. The lightning stretcher who would dare now to boast of his record of 4000 miles is laughed to scorn and humbled in the

dust by some one asking him why he was using the magnetic. The knight of the key who balanced on an apple box while the tanker tied herself in bow knots in a nasty sea, and stretched his patience to the breaking point, has faded into the background to be replaced by the one who bestirs himself some fifteen minutes before morning chow, calls up some neighboring ship, and wheedles the obliging operator out of the night's press so that the skipper's grouch may be somewhat appeased.

Once upon a time they tuned the set to any old wave length, just so she'd radiate her best, and each and every operator had his own personal ideas as to what position the helix clip should be in, these ideas being dutifully tested out as soon as the good ship had cleared the three mile limit, Now they call for six hundred meters and woe be the unlucky one who uses his own individuality in shifting clips promiscuously, and no longer does the shore operator say words that make the strands on the aerial curl as he vainly explores the upper reaches of the ether in a vain attempt to find out where the "Bungolia" has departed to from her accustomed wave length.

And say—can you remember when the operator on shore leave was attired even as Solomon in all his glory? The varicolored coat worn by Joseph would have but passed as a vain attempt to compete with "Sparks" when he dolled up in full uniform and strolled down the streets of the little lumber town where the ship was waiting for cargo. Who has forgotten the golden sparks which radiated from his cap, collar and sleeves, yea, even from the cuffs of his neatly pressed pants—creased to an edge that would make a razor blade feel like a broken down hack-saw. It was not to be wondered at why sometimes the passengers thought that the Skipper was awfully young for such an important position. But no more: Only a plain little badge to

indicate his rank. The silver and golden sparks that gave him the appearance of a winged Mercury have gone with the other memories of the days that were.

"Chewing the fat" was then a favorite pastime with the fellows hard put to pass dismal night on watch. Many a witty saying and more or less personal remarks spun their way between aeriels, and—regretful though it may be—personal feuds were started through some unpolitic remark dropped over the air. Especially when some chap with an idea of his own importance "jammed" the ether with a 5 kw. when the other fellow who had a bunch of positions to report despaired of ever hitting his bunk that night and started in to say things about the offending operator's ancestry, his personal appearance, etc., until the hot wire ammeter would start to show signs of registering other things than juice. Now, if there are any remarks to be made, they take the more conventional form of a duly checked off message, or an underscored remark on the log sheet. And what censoring is done, is done in the privacy of the head-operator's office.

Among those who have seen the old days go, with perhaps the keenest regret of all, are the amateurs who were early in the game. Not to be forgotten is the episode of the operator, who when some 3500 miles from San Francisco, thought he heard the familiar tone of old P H, and after some time of nerve racking suspense, when communication was finally established, to learn that he had an operator in San Jose, amat-

eur, 5 kw., "on the air." Yep, those were the good old days. Then the amateurs long distance record depended on the fellow with the heaviest powered transformer, the largest helix and aerial, and the ability to stretch things to twice their normal length. Audions were unknown, rotary gaps were regarded with distrust and with due respect of their ability to sling plugs like a rapid-fire cannon, some fellows still swore by carborundum, and the happy amateur who could scrape up enough wire to make a twenty strand antennae was looked upon as a leading light. The more junk on the table the better, and an amateur with six hundred switches, buzzers, sounders, relays, medical coils, motors, electric lights, ten detectors and five different aerial connections held front rank as a scientist. It looked well, and the uninitiated wondered what it was all about. Alas, no more. Audions replace mineral, the quenched gap has crowded the rotary to some extent, and from the noisy damped spark to the quiet arc is but a short step. The amateur who worked three hundred miles with another amateur in the old days was either a wonder or a liar; now one hardly boasts of three times that distance. Helixes two feet long with fifty turns no longer adorn the average equipment—the radio inspector has seen to that.

So have the old days passed. And probably ten years from now, the wireless art of today will be looked upon as the antediluvian period, and the ambitious amateurs will be planning a relay to Mars. Who knows?

American men form a Relay League
Manned to outwit and prevent intrigue,
Each doing his best, as in him lay,
Receiving and sending at close of day,
Improving himself and giving news,
Careful to send subscription and dues,
Always remembering that interest will
show
New ways and means that are good to
know.

Radio travels where wires cut down
Arrest and delay from town to town,
Doing a work that is safe and sure
In guarding against the evil-doer,
Offering chance to resist surprise—

Relay stations opening wide their eyes—
Everyone warned in time to prepare.
Let all combine to do their share
A well-lined net to cover o'er
Your country's map from shore to shore.

League work is pleasant pastime, when
Earnest endeavor leads its men,
Accomplishing what 'twas meant to do,
Giving fresh lists who are sure to put
through,
Uniting in bonds that never will cease,
Each and all pledged to preserve our
peace.

Contributor.