

2913 Foster Avenue
Brooklyn, New York
April 10, 1941

Mr. William L. Chenery
Editor
Collier's Weekly
250 Park Avenue
New York, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Chenery:

Nearly two weeks ago, I spoke to you over the 'phone and said I would write you a letter. The delay in doing so has been due solely to my earnest desire to sell my story - my swan song, perhaps - to Collier's.

During the past thirty years, I have submitted, very infrequently, verse; fiction, and articles to Collier's, but never made it. Of these I recall most clearly an article on "The Irish Grievance," submitted August 1916, just after my return from Ireland, where I had an assignment as correspondent of the N.Y. Times. Mr. Uzzell told me at the time that the editorial consensus was that my article was "an historic document of first importance" - but it was nevertheless found unavailable. Subsequently, it was published (but in emasculated form) in the Century.

The next effort that springs to mind was in 1917, with a piece of fiction, a scientific phantasy, entitled "The Throne of Chaos." This was accepted subsequently by Bob Davis for the All Story.

The next effort that I recall was in 1917 with an article entitled "Wake Up - and Get Up!" The subsequent fate of this article was interesting, but I won't go into that now.

My next presentation to Collier's was in 1932 with an article entitled "A Parable in Gold." I don't think it is necessary for me to remind you about that.

And now to the matter in hand:

In a few weeks, it will be 100 years since Edgar Allan Poe wrote his essay on Cryptography. In that essay (and similarly in his famous story The Gold Bug), Poe gave deliberate utterance to the following dictum:

"It may be roundly asserted that human ingenuity cannot concoct a cipher which human ingenuity cannot resolve."

Poe was the first person ever to state explicitly this opinion - an opinion which is the consensus of the world's "experts."

Now, Mr. Chenery, I'm going to put to you a hypothetical question:

Suppose you were to be credibly told that Poe was wrong; and that the experts' consensus is wrong - that not alone is it possible to write a cipher which human ingenuity cannot resolve; but that it is possible for any man; woman, or child on the face of the earth to do this anywhere, in any language and for ever. If, I repeat, you were to be credibly told this, do you think the readers of Collier's would be interested in an article on this subject?

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Twenty three years ago, I discovered the system by which it is possible for anyone to concoct a cipher which is materially and mathematically indecipherable; but although I spent thousands of dollars, and much more valuable time, I never got anywhere with it.

More than twenty years ago, I submitted a crude working model to Colonel Parker Hitt, who was then stationed in Governors Island. Colonel Hitt was a distinguished cryptologist. He was the author of the official "Manual for the solution of Military Ciphers" issued a few years previously at Fort Leavenworth; and he had been with Pershing in France in charge of "Intelligence." After studying my model for four months he wrote me a letter, which I still possess, in which he says in part:

"As to the principle of your machine, it is undoubtedly a most ingenious and effective device....."

"I have attempted to formulate a plan for breaking down this system of yours and so far have not been able to do it."

"I feel that you could safely go ahead with the commercial exploitation of the machine with confidence in the practical indecipherability of the product....."

"I assure you of my interest in it, and I want to thank you for having let me see it and for your courtesy in putting the cards on the table for me."

And if you bear in mind the fact that the writer of this letter was a member of our War College, and himself the author of an official "Manual" for instructing officers how to decipher cryptograms, I think you will agree that his letter was pretty generous. Let me add that I have always esteemed Colonel Hitt as a perfect gentleman. He is still alive, I hope, for I have corresponded with him since then, and heard from him as late as 1937.

Into the subject of my Odyssey since then, I do not now think it wise to enter. I am very desirous, Mr. Chenery, that you read this letter; and for that reason I'll cut out anything more except a few references to five enclosures.

The first of these enclosures is a ten page booklet entitled "Chnocipher - the Ultimate Elusion." This booklet was prepared by me in 1937 for demonstration to the Navy Department (and let me say right here that they never have disputed my claim about its indecipherability.)

The first four pages - lines 1 to 100 are an encipherment of the sentence
All good, quick brown foxes jump over lazy dogs to save their party.
This line - a conglomerate of the two well-known tags - was chosen for frequency and because it contains every letter in the alphabet. In it there are 55 letters, including the comma and the period. This line - verbatim et literatim - is enciphered in each of the 100 lines on the first four pages of my booklet.

On page 5 there are a few introductory words to the Declaration of Independence, which begins, as marked, in line 105 and ends, as marked on page 10, in line 227. Then immediately in line 227, as marked, the Gettysburg speech begins and ends, as marked, in line 248.

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The second of my enclosures is four pages, 333 to 336 from "The American Black Chamber." Here Yardley talks obviously from hearsay about the American Tel. & Tel. cipher (which I know all about), and also about my system, of which he has only hearsay information.

My third and fourth enclosures are a letter from the Colonel Moorman mentioned on page 223 of the "Black Chamber" - together with that page.

My fifth enclosure is a letter from the State Department in Washington, dated September 2, 1921. In view of the fact that President Roosevelt recently warned both Hopkins and Winant against using the telephone or cable for confidential messages, this letter from the State Department twenty years ago is illuminative of a lot of things not the least of which is the fact that I never got anywhere with my idea.

To conclude, Sir, I submit to you that I have presented enough to entitle me to at least a further hearing from you. It would not be my desire to write a technical article; nor to discuss the military aspects of my cipher; nor to speak of my experiences with any Government Department.

What I have in mind is simply an article, written for Tom and Dick and Harry, the thesis of which would be the opposite to that of Poe, written 100 years ago, and which would oppose also the consensus of international experts.

In support of my thesis, I present a concrete example of my system, an example which, I state flatly, is absolutely indecipherable by any process of human ratiocination.

And, in this last connection, permit me to mention that if every man, woman and child on the face of the earth were to be given a model, identical with my own, to work on, and if they were all to encipher the same sentence and the same Declaration of Independence and the same Gettysburg Speech; and if they were all to do this every day for the next trillion years - no two of the encipherments would be alike.

In offering my story to Collier's, I want to assure you that never before have I *sought* publicity for this story. On June 8, 1919, there was a brief article of mine inserted, for the purpose of establishing priority only, in the New York Herald, at which time I was in charge of the financial department of that paper.

With great respect Sir, I am

Yours sincerely,

J.F. Byrne