



May We Introduce —The Man Who Keeps A Luxury Liner In Touch With The World

On the left is Mr. R. A. J. Owlett, chief wireless operator on the R.M.S. Franconia, which called at Auckland and Wellington last week in the course of a luxury cruise of the world. Mr. Owlett, in the interview on this page, tells something of the duties of a wireless operator on a ship like the Franconia.

HALF an hour before noon on the day the Franconia arrived in port the chief wireless operator, Mr. R. A. J. Owlett, was dressing. He had not been to a party at sea the previous night. He explained that he had been keeping the "middle watch." Just because the ship was a luxury tourist liner was no reason why the wireless men should indulge in the luxury of sleeping overtime. Rather did it mean that there was as much work to do as might be the case on an ordinary trip. When he had finished dressing the chief operator was prepared to talk radio, and, like almost every other ship's operator one has met, he was as wrapped up in his work as though it had been a hobby.

Every radio enthusiast has his idea of the perfect set, and most men whose living is the wireless room aboard ship build sets from time to time, which either are, or should be, much better than any set they can buy. Mr. Owlett is no exception. So far his latest effort is one of six valves, which will, in course of time, become an eight-valve set capable of super-selectivity and great wave range. That is for his own use in receiving broadcast programmes, of course, which are provided liberally for ship's receivers, unhampered as they are with that "local station" bugbear borne with so little patience by those ashore.

Loudspeakers have not been installed on the Franconia at every corridor corner and in every lounge and public room. For receiving broadcasts the tourists have to provide their own sets and install their own aerials—usually simple matters of a piece of wire round the cabin. The absence of the "community" loudspeakers is probably a popular feature, for the passengers do not have music and announcements thrust upon them all day when they would rather listen to themselves or one another. For their music they rely on their cabin installations, which they can turn on and off at their pleasure. The only drawback to this is occasional interference with the ship's official communications on short-wave, when some passenger's set may be oscillat-

ing much to the annoyance of the operators on the top deck.

Although the wireless room on this steamer is not luxurious in keeping with the passengers' part of the ship, it is capable of making daylight contact with New York from Wellington. Most of the work goes on at night, however, for the sake of better conditions. There is not often much urgent traffic for the ship's equipment which cannot wait for the hours between dusk and dawn. On this trip of the Franconia the daily transmissions from passengers have varied between two or three and 25 messages. On a cruise of this nature, there is not so much demand on the wireless as there would be in a trans-Atlantic crossing, for people have usually undertaken the cruise for the leisure they will enjoy, and business is left behind them for a few months. Things might be different if Wall Street started another scare. . . .

So during the daytime the operators have a rather easy time, but at night the generators hum and the keys inspire their high-pitched whistle almost continuously, as they "talk" to the other side of the world. A day's messages from the Franconia may be transmitted to a dozen different countries as far apart as Australia, England, Honolulu, Japan and the United States.

Talking of talking, it will not be long before every liner of the Franconia's tonnage and upwards will be fitted with radio telephones for passengers. The advance in this development has permitted some of the trans-Atlantic liners to install a stock-broker's office aboard ship, so that the hustle of life ashore may be carried on unbroken by business men travelling between Europe and the States. Mr. Owlett has served 11 years in the wireless rooms of the Berengaria and the Aquitania on the Atlantic run.

He described the latest thing in radio-telephones for ships' passengers, whereby the carrier wave operates only while a person is actually speaking into the telephone. As soon as the voice stops the carrier automatically cuts out, thus facilitating two-way conversation without interference from the carrier. With a ship the size of the Europa (Continued on page 17.)