



## **The Lay of the Last Signalman**

**On a thickly-wooded sponson, where the last projector stands,  
The museum pair of hand-flags hanging idly in my hands,  
With my jargon half-forgotten, of my stock-in-trade bereft,  
I wonder what's ahead of me – the only Bunting left.**

**The relics of my ancient craft have vanished one by one.  
The cruiser arc, the morse flag and manoeuvring lights have gone  
And I hear they'd be useless in the final global war  
As the helio, the foghorn and the masthead semaphore.**

**The mast is sprouting gadgets like a nightmare Christmas tree.  
There are whips and stubs and wave-guides where my halyards used to be.  
And I couldn't hoist a tackline through the lunatic array,  
For at every height and angle there's a dipole in the way.**

**The alert and hawk-eyed signalman is rendered obsolete  
By electrically-operated Optics of the Fleet,  
And the leaping barracuda or the charging submarine  
Can be sighted as blob upon a fluorescent screen.**

**To delete the human error, to erase a noble breed,  
We rely upon a relay, and we pin our faith to Creed,  
So we press a button, make a switch and spin a little wheel.  
And it's cent per cent efficient – when we're on an even keel.**

**But again I may be needed, for the time will surely come  
When we have to talk in silence, and the modern stuff is dumb,  
When the signal lantern's flashing or the flags are flying free –  
It was good enough for Nelson, and it's good enough for me.**