

## *Interastral Telegraphy*

*A new application of wireless telegraphy.  
How to communicate with all the stars.  
Decisive and conclusive experiments.*

Recently, I read a note in the majority of the scientific journals conceived very much in these terms:

“Experiments in wireless telegraphy are being multiplied and extended. They have been carried out between the port of Cuxhaven and the island of Heligoland, Sixty-two kilometers separate these two stations, and the communications were made in perfect conditions of precision. Wireless telegraphy has ceased to be a subject of scientific curiosity; it exists, and we can be certain that its development will be rapid.

“Already, in England, a Post Office commission that has been studying the question for several months has delivered a report in which it concludes in favor of the adoption of the Marconi system by the English postal authorities. There is no need to stress the importance of this news. Its confirmation will be neither more nor less than the commencement of a revolution in the telegraphic system of the world.”

I beg you to believe that I bring no authorial pretension or inventorial jealousy to this matter, but when I had finished reading that item I could not help smiling in pity.

Poor folk! They’re still at a distance of sixty-two kilometers, while it’s been a long time since I not only achieved interplanetary telegraphy by interastral telegraphy, between the thirty million worlds catalogued by Janssen<sup>1</sup> and the eighty million other worlds that, being too distant, have not yet been revealed by photography, either because their light has not reached us yet or for some other cause.

Since the day when, thanks to my profound knowledge of the electrical fluid I was able to enter into sustained communication with the inhabitants of the planet Mars, as I have described here, by means of fire—which is to say, visible electricity—and photography—which is to say, light or invisible electricity—the problem was mentally resolved, so far as I was concerned. All that remained was fining the material application, and with patience, tenacity and—ought I admit?—a great deal of fumbling, I finally arrived at a victorious solution to the problem.

What was to be determined, first of all, was whether the star-worlds were inhabited, and whether it was possible to understand their languages, which were probably very varied.

There remained that matter of entering into communication with their inhabitants by wireless telegraphy, which was mathematically possible, in my view—but how could I alert them?

It was then that I reasoned, very simply, as follows:

I ought to find myself facing one of three alternatives. Either the stars are too old, dead or uninhabited—one day, I shall explain how a star dies—or, according to the theory of Fontenelle, who believed, quite rightly, in the plurality of worlds, a large number of star-worlds are inhabited, but the inhabitants are in a savage state and would have no suspicion of my attempts to contact them, or, finally, the stars are inhabited by people as civilized as us. In the last-cited case, there was a good chance that, their already being in possession of electric telegraphy apparatus perhaps much more powerful than ours, my provocative dispatches would encounter their receivers and would be recorded as a result.

Fortified by these ideas and hopes, I therefore embarked calmly on that course, naturally making use of wireless telegraphy and sending, if I might put it thus, a collective dispatch to the hundred and twenty million star-worlds immediately surrounding us, in what might be called the suburbs of Earth, within a few billion trillion quadrillion leagues.

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<sup>1</sup> This is probably be an invention; the most recent star-catalogue published when Vibert wrote this story was the second Washington catalogue compiled by J. R. Eastman; I cannot find evidence of any involvement in a recent catalogue by anyone named Janssen or Jansen.

I waited with a combination of confidence, impatience and tranquility, and while I waited in that very particular state of mind—which is incomprehensible to anyone who has never sent dispatches that far—I made calculations and told myself that even with my electric fluid, which moved rapidly, there were definitely large numbers of stars too distant for any communication, from which I would not receive a response within seventy-five years. I was even getting ready to make my will in order to implore my notary's successors to record the replies after my death, when I reflected that I still had time to think about it.

Then the terrible idea occurred to me, with the nagging pan of a dagger slowly tickling my heart, that I would never be able to establish a direct service of balloons or interplanetary ten-centime tramways. And that realization caused me veritable sadness.

Soon, however, replies began to arrive in quantity; I had not been mistaken. The problem of long-distance telegraphy, through the spaces of infinity, was resolved; millions of star-worlds were inhabited and civilized, like the Earth; and—an important and curious point—with a profound knowledge of Hebrew, I succeeded with relative ease in translating and understanding all the dispatches, written in the most various languages and with the most bizarre characters, conventional or otherwise.

There is, I think, no need to insist on the importance of my discovery. At the present moment, I have not yet opened all my replies, with the aid of my seventy-one secretaries, to whom I have given a key to decipher them; I can say, however, that I already have correspondents in seventeen million, eight hundred and twenty-nine thousand, four hundred and seven planets, stars or worlds as unfamiliar to date as the telegraph service.

I really did say 17,829,407 *worlds*, and I believe that, on that account, without flattering myself, I have outdone Mougeot,<sup>2</sup> who has not yet succeeded in corresponding with anyone beyond the Earth except St. Anthony of Padua, and Swedenborg himself is conclusively buried all the way to the hilt.

Now, in order to undertake further studies and pay my secretaries, I have opened a telegraph office for anyone who wants to send interastral dispatches, in the hope of re-establishing contact with their mother-in-law or someone they love.

I have a list of stars and correspondents and, until further notice, I have established a uniform tariff. It's a thousand francs a letter; when there's an acute or grave accent, or a period, it's twelve francs a letter; a diacresis or circumflex accent costs thirteen francs with the letter; finally, a cedilla is valued at fifteen francs, given the difficulty of certain interastral punctuations and accentuations.

I don't know if the clientele will flood in, but, in spite of the relatively high process—which is hardly anything, if one takes account of the distances, and which our general expenses prevent me from lowering for the moment—either I'm much mistaken or it seems to me that I'm finally on the verge of making a fortune, while having accomplished it by means of one of the greatest scientific discoveries of the beginning of the 20th century.

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<sup>2</sup> An artist who signed himself E. Mougeot produced several images of saints in the early 1900s, but I cannot find any record of his being in communication with any of them.

## *What's the Point?*

*The death of the Sun.  
The impossibility of communication between the stars.  
The negligibility of glory before time and space.  
The uselessness of writing.*

I recently found myself at the banquet of a literary society, infiltrated by a number of funeral directors, at which a writer made the following very judicious speech over dessert, which I made an effort to learn by heart, and which I am reproducing here with almost total fidelity:

“Ladies and dear colleagues.

“It is with tears in my voice that I come to say my farewells to you, so permit me modestly to propose a toast: put out the torches! But I perceive that there’s nothing here but electricity, so I shall call: put out the bulbs.

“Don’t worry, I’m always brief; you won’t have time to put earplugs in.

“As we’re all old friends here and I’ve been taking part in your fraternal love-feasts for twenty years, I owe you an explanation of the reasons for this retirement, as premature as it is unexpected. It will be brief, simple and clear.

“All today’s scientists agree in affirming that that the sun will soon die. Some say in three hundred million years, others affirm that it will only happen in three hundred billion years, but that slight difference of opinion is of no importance. The brutal fact remains; the sun is going to die tomorrow—for three hundred billion years is tomorrow, by comparison with eternity.

“On the other hand, our excellent and illustrious friend Janssen has already catalogued, labeled and baptized—the dear chap—more than thirty million stars, and by his own admission, there are still more than a hundred and twenty million that are still hanging around, waiting in the vertiginous plains of infinity for an opportunity to pass before an astronomer’s objective lens.

“Apart from the suns and a few worlds perhaps reverted to infancy because they are too old, it is evident that all these worlds are inhabited, and yet, in the present state of science, we have not yet found a means of communicating with them. Thus far, as I have recounted here myself, I have scarcely been able to exchange a few brief sentences with the inhabitants of Mars and photograph a young Martian woman.

“From these two observations, it follows clearly that it is utterly useless to write, since we have the certainty that our works cannot endure either in time or in space, and the only thing that could incite me to continue writing is the possibility of telegraphing my works to all the worlds—but in a broader sense that the one attached to that banal phrase on the Earth.<sup>3</sup>

“As this is not the case, however, what is three hundred billion years? Scarcely a token gesture sketched in time.

“What are a hundred and twenty million stars—or five hundred billion, if you wish? A few grains of dust, almost invisible in the dark void, the impalpable waves of the boundless infinity of space.

“Given that, at least until further notice, my thought cannot endure either in time or in space, what point is there in continuing to accumulate an immense quotidian labor, as I have been doing for thirty years?

“Charron said: *what do I know?*—and that was also the opinion of his friend Montaigne.<sup>4</sup> For myself, more modestly, I say: *What’s the point?*

“And that is why, from now on, my resolution is irrevocable. I shall retire from the field—to Courcelles!

“With the mind thus freed of any sickening preoccupation, abrupt or creeping, however, before retiring forever to the wilderness out there beyond the Place Monceau, I want to tell you that I shall still remain in your midst, a dependable, active, virile and devoted member, for as long as possible.

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<sup>3</sup> Because the French *monde* means “social stratum” as well as “world,” *tous les mondes* [all the worlds], in the context of literary marketing conventionally implies “all sections of society.”

<sup>4</sup> It was Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) who made “Que sais-je?” into a celebrated motto; Pierre Charron (1541-1603) merely took over responsibility for his intellectual heritage after his death.

“And now, ladies and dear colleagues, my dear friends, I raise my glass and drink to the old French gaiety, to *joie de vivre*, to all that is good on the earth: to liberty, love, justice and friendship!”

Indeed, the colleague who, while still relatively young, declares in such a casual manner that he is renouncing the ephemeral glory of a day, the notoriety, the celebrity and the posterity, because, in his thirst for the ideal and the absolute, he feels, he *sees* that eternity is escaping him, appears to me to be a profound philosopher.

It is necessary to see things from on high to reason with that freedom of mind, that amiable grace, to be moved in that manner, without having vertigo, in the very ambience of the redoubtable problems that will always pose themselves to the interrogative and curious mind of every thinking being in time and space!

In addition, here is a spiritual lesson in transcendental philosophy, which ought not to be entirely lost on the funeral directors who heard it.

*Similis similibus curantor.*

Unless you prefer: *contraria contrariis.*<sup>5</sup>

Personally, it's all the same to me—and that, quite simply, is my conclusion.

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<sup>5</sup> When the former of these two contrasted phrases (“like to cure like”) was advanced in the early 19th century as the fundamental principle of homeopathy, the latter (“contrast [against] contrariety”) was suggested, tongue-in-cheek, as the tacit principle of classical medicine.