THE LATE POSTAL DIFFICULTIES IN PARIS
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**Note: This article refers to the Franco-Prussian War and the Siege of Paris**

At 3o’clock p.m., on the 18th September, 1870 the last mail-train from Paris was dispatched by the Western Line. The day after the blockade was complete. In twenty-four hours the German armies had surrounded Paris with the iron circle, and during four and a-half months the postal administration had to employ every artifice and exercise their inventive powers to the utmost, to evade the watchfulness of the Germans.

A few days before the investment, the prefect of the Nord and the president of the chamber of commerce of Lille, had the happy forethought to send 900 pigeons to Paris, belonging to various amateur clubs at Roubaix and Turcoing.

Everybody had heard that the carrier-pigeons, which had their pigeon house is Paris, were taken out by the balloons, and let loose in the provinces, whence they brought news. But it was carefully concealed that reverse service was carried on also by means of the pigeons from Roubaix and Turcoing, which were dispatched from the Jardin des Plantes, where they were kept. The balloons sufficed to carry out the whole of the correspondence from Paris, so that the pigeons were reserved for the special services of the government dispatches when the winds were unfavourable.

But the return letters presented the great difficulty. Out of about 200 pigeons carried into the country by the balloons (99 since the beginning of December), only 73 returned to dovecot; and out of this number, five had no dispatches; there of them bore the celebrated apocryphal dispatches of the German; and ten merely brought the intelligence of the descent of the balloons which took them out.

In presence of so poor a result, the Post-office resorted to the antiquated system of pedestrians. As early as the 23rd September they had endeavoured to hide the letters or the country under the hay and contents of the market-gardeners’ carts; but not one of these carts were able to get through. The pedestrians were a little more fortunate; between the 20th September and the 30th October, after which date the Post-office discontinued the attempt, 85 messengers were dispatched. Out of this number nine were made prisoners; one was arrested and afterwards liberated, one disappeared, one arrived, at Tours without dispatches, where also one of the nine prisoners arrived, having made his escape. Five only were able to deliver their correspondence and out of these two only succeeded in re-entering with correspondence. All the rest after attempting to pass by all the localities round Paris, and by every point of the compass, were obliged to retrace their steps before the string of sentinels who intercepted their way. An investment so absolute, around an area so large, is a fact which is the astonishment of every one who has the smallest notion of military science.

It was necessary to have recourse to other means. One way naturally presented itself, the Siene. It was tempting to think that the peaceable current of the river would bring us news of our families under the very noses of the Prussians. But the enemy who had the wit to mount guns on carriages jointed like the foot of a telescope to reach the balloons, who had prepared falcons and hawks to chase the pigeons,
took good care not to forget the river, and nets barred the course of it. The best intentions of the Post Office were in consequence completely paralysed; nothing could escape the watch of the German Argus.

On the 6th December an agreement was concluded with M.M. Venoven, Delort and Robert, for conveyance to Paris of photographed dispatches enclosed in small floating balls. Great were the hopes; - the delegation had even prepared at the end of December a decree fixing the rules for this correspondence, - but the balls were waited for in vain, they never arrived. Another inventor proposed to substitute corks, of which there are always so many floating down the Seine, but it does not appear to have been tried. Still, it offered some little chance of success. The enemy might have disdained to fish up the rubbish it saw every day.

They passed in the air, - they endeavored to pass by land, - on the water, under the water; - they even endeavored to pass underground, for messengers offered to try to escape by the catacombs; but not one was able to pass, and one met with a horrible death, engulfed in the mud.

When man failed, they tried the animals; after they birds they tried the beasts. M. Hurel engaged that he would send in shepherd dogs well used to find their way. Five of these dogs sent out on the 13th January by balloon, but not one returned, perhaps the Prussians, or the franc-teurs, or the mobiles, have transformed the poor dogs into gigots! – The Philatelist