

# Radio As A Means of Expression and Contact\*

By DR. LEE de FOREST

**T**O celebrate its first anniversary, WOR has tonight assembled representatives from the three great principles of expression, the newspaper, the motion picture and the radio, and has done me the honor to speak on behalf of radio as a medium of expression. I like better to consider radio broadcasting as a medium of *contact*, for without question it has already demonstrated the fact that radio broadcasting brings the millions of our citizens, high and low, in cities and in the most remote districts, into contact with our leaders in every field of activity; political leaders, leaders of the drama, of art, great editors, captains of industry, singers and musicians—in a manner in which no other medium, since the beginning of civilization, has begun to approach. And I hold that it is in this peculiar property of personal contact between the widespread millions of our citizens and the comparatively few gathered nightly in the small auditoriums of our broadcasting stations, which is responsible more than any other factor for the immense and ever-increasing popularity of radio.

## FIRST BROADCASTING IN 1909

In 1909 when the idea of radio broadcasting first occurred to me, and the music of the Metropolitan Opera singers was for the first time launched upon the ether, and again in 1916 when for the first time regular radio concerts were maintained from the old station at Highbridge, when I had a small but intensely interested audience growing in numbers nightly—there began to dawn before me a vision of the astonishing potentialities of the radio broadcast, which vision the last eighteen months has been bringing more and more into reality. But I confess that in those early pioneer days my eager imagination fell far short of picturing the astonishing hold with which this idea so suddenly gripped our entire Nation. And not alone the American people, for I have found that in England, France, Holland, and even in Germany, wherever the fame of American broadcasting has penetrated it has enkindled to an astonishing degree the imagination of classes which one might doubt would respond so quickly. In truth, the broadcasting idea which America may be justly proud of originating is already outgrowing national boundaries. Already the radio telephone is beginning its benign work of breaking down the artificial barriers erected by politics or race. Nothing since the early days of the discoverers has so appealed to the imagination of a nation. No other medium in man's history has demonstrated its unique powers for uniting far separated sections of a great country, for causing to become acquainted dwellers in distant districts from North to South—from East to West. More than the newspaper, more than the postal service, this mighty service of hearing the spoken voice in greeting, the public address, the sermon, the lecture, the musical program, is actively uniting us in a bond of common fellowship, common acquaintanceship, as no other conceivable instrumentality can accomplish. I predict that as an educational medium the radio telephone broadcast will in time prove second in importance only to the public school. Already

we see a closer interlinkage between the people of Canada and ourselves due to the broadcasting idea; and soon these benefits will extend to Europe, between the peoples of the old world, always heretofore strangers, enemies because strangers and personally unacquainted. When, night after night, the citizens of foreign lands will hear the friendly words, the music and the songs from across strange frontiers, then gradually will the feelings of enmity and suspicion, based chiefly on distance and ignorance of each other, change to understanding and good will. Thus I maintain that radio



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broadcast with its irresistible educational influence is destined to prove one of the most potent powers for the abolition of war.

## TIME OF CENTRAL STATIONS NEAR

So rapidly is this movement growing that it will not be long before the necessary high power broadcasting stations will be planted in all our cities, each covering a sufficiently wide area to enfold the entire land in a mantle of music, to breathe into every ear which cares to listen, voices of comfort, of nightly companionship with the world's doings and the world's best minds. "Just a Song at Twilight"—but its lovely echoes are being heard in the miner's cabin, in the rancher's hut, in the living room of the old farmhouse, over the mountain range, beyond the desert, across the silent prairie, over the wastes of sea. And who can say what minds are not awakened, what souls that were deadened, what hearts long embittered by loneliness, will not be stirred to a new life, a new outlook by that sound?

## BROADCASTING A MEANS OF UNIVERSAL EDUCATION

When one seriously considers the human side of this broadcasting idea and its possibilities, one must admit that it possesses potentialities for universal education, and for all the train of good which results from universal education, which can be compared only to that brought about during the past five centuries, by the art of printing. Only this new revolution will grow to maturity in a decade, instead of 500 years—a graphic commentary on the acceleration of man's present progress.

I have for a long time maintained that this educational value of radio broadcasting will prove by far its greatest worth—to the people of our country—and later of all nations. No doubt just now the entertainment feature is the most striking, the phase most appealing to the popular desire, naturally enough. Unquestionably the fine programs which are now being given by the large broadcasting stations are accountable for the astonishing spread of receiving stations during the past eighteen months.

But comparison of radio broadcasting to the introduction of the printing press is not too bold. When newspaper and press syndicates realize its full possibilities in their own field (and their leaders are rapidly coming to this realization), this comparison will become commonplace. Editors now have a medium where antenna wires take the place of Mergenthaler type-setters, ether waves of ink and press paper, head phones of spectacles and ears of eyes. It is indeed gratifying to me to note the wholehearted and enthusiastic co-operation of the American press generally to the broadcasting idea. Without this broad vision on the part of newspaper men the present popularity and astonishingly rapid growth of broadcasting would have been quite impossible.

It is, therefore, a great pleasure for me to speak to you tonight in company with that Nesper of the American Press, Melville E. Stone, who earlier than any other American newspaper man (as far back as 1899) foresaw something of the immense possibilities of wireless in newspaper service, and who has ever since those early years stood out conspicuously as a believer and advocate in the future of wireless as a medium of contact with the people.

Such occasions as this tonight, when I again take part in the radio telephone broadcasting which I have labored so many years to bring about, are occasions of profound personal satisfaction. They bring back vividly to me the countless nights of experiment, frequently discouraging, the step by step up-building of this idea, and the device which has made it finally a reality. And with them comes a profound sense of gratitude. For I realize on such occasions as this the personal sense of contact and friendship with the untold thousands of listeners who are realizing with me the actuality of an old dream. And so I bid you all Good Night.

\*Speech Broadcast from WOR on July 23

## PARIS HAS BOULEVARD RADIO CONCERTS

*Le Matin*, the well-known Parisian Daily, is operating a concert radio receiving set in front of its office on a popular boulevard, where crowds gather to listen to news, con-

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