[[1]](#endnote-1)No one would have believed in the last years of the nineteenth century that this world was being watched keenly and closely by intelligences greater than man's and yet as mortal as his own; that as men busied themselves about their various concerns, they were scrutinized and studied, perhaps almost as narrowly as a man with a microscope might scrutinize the transient creatures that swarm and multiply in a drop of water. With infinite complacency, men went to and fro over this globe about their little affairs, serene in their assurance of their empire over matter. It is possible that the infusoria under the microscope do the same. No one gave a thought to the older worlds of space as sources of human danger, or thought of them only to dismiss the idea of life upon them as impossible or improbable. It is curious to recall some of the mental habits of those departed days. At most, terrestrial men fancied there might be other men upon Mars, perhaps inferior to themselves and ready to welcome a missionary enterprise. Yet, across the gulf of space, minds that are to our minds as ours are to those of the beasts that perish, intellects vast and cool and unsympathetic, regarded this earth with envious eyes, and slowly and surely drew their plans against us. And early in the twentieth century came the great disillusionment.

[[2]](#endnote-2)The planet Mars, I scarcely need remind the reader, revolves around the Sun at a mean distance of 140,000,000 miles, and the light and heat it receives from the Sun is barely half of that received by this world. If the nebular hypothesis has any truth, it must be older than our world; and long before this Earth ceased to be molten, life upon its surface must have begun its course. The fact that it is scarcely one seventh of the volume of the Earth must have accelerated its cooling to the temperature at which life could begin. It has air and water and all that is necessary for the support of animate existence.

Yet so vain is man, and so blinded by his vanity, that no writer up to the very end of the nineteenth century expressed any idea that intelligent life might have developed there far, or indeed at all, beyond its earthly level. Nor was it generally understood that since Mars is older than our earth, with scarcely a quarter of its surface area and farther from the sun, it necessarily follows that it is not only further from its beginning but closer to its end.

[[3]](#footnote-1)The secular cooling that must someday overtake our planet has already gone far indeed with our neighbor. Its physical condition is still largely a mystery, but we know now that even in its equatorial region, the midday temperature barely approaches that of our coldest winter. Its air is much more attenuated than ours, its oceans have shrunk until they cover only a third of its surface, and as its slow seasons change, huge snowcaps gather and melt around either pole and periodically inundate its temperate zones. That last stage of exhaustion, which to us is still incredibly remote, has become a present-day problem for the inhabitants of Mars. The immediate pressure of necessity has sharpened their intellects, enlarged their powers, and hardened their hearts. And looking across space with instruments and intelligence such as we have scarcely dreamed of, they see, at its nearest distance only 35,000,000 miles sunward of them, a morning star of hope: our own warmer planet, green with vegetation and grey with water, with a cloudy atmosphere eloquent of fertility, with glimpses through its drifting cloud wisps of broad stretches of populous country and narrow, navy-crowded seas.

1. 1 January 1801 – 31 December 1900 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The fourth planet from the Sun. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. 1,609.344 meters [↑](#footnote-ref-1)