

Halley's Comet Is Already Making Trouble on Earth

Hysterical People Consulting Astrologers and Expecting the Worst.

Eight things a Comet always brings: Wars, Famines, Plagues and Death to Kings, War, Earthquakes, Floods and Dire Things.

So the old jingle goes. It was made in Germany in 1818, but as a summary of what the world has thought of comets in all ages it is handy and complete. Any stray bit of bad luck that might be left out is certainly one of the "dire things," and so hangs, prophetically speaking, to the comet's tail. Poets, priests, philosophers and monarchs have all believed and circulated these celestial scandals from the days of Sodom and Gomorrah down, so that for millions now living the comet has had a name that beats the combined evil reputations of a Spanish Governor together with half a dozen investigated State Senators and a score of Pittsburgh councilmen.

Whatever damage comets may have done by shedding mystic "influences" among the stars, it is a fact that no great comet ever appeared that did not actually work over the superstitions, the terrors and the ambitions of men so as to leave earthly affairs a little different from the way they were before. Panic and murder, war and suicide, one or all, have followed in the train of each apparition and made unnumbered tracks on the path of history. Halley's comet of 1910 is not an exception to the rule. Already it has a very pretty reputation as a trouble maker.

There was John McGrath, who went out with his wife and his pipe to see the comet. It was the only pipe he had had in eleven years—a black "T. D."—and good the way nothing but an old clay pipe can be, when you have bitten off six and a half inches of the seven-inch stem. The old couple came down toward Bellevue Hospital, and there they saw two great stars burning in the brownish dawn over Williamsburg. The wife stretched out her hand and pointed.

"That's the comet, John," she said. "The left-hand one. I seen it first. I told you I would. You won't let on I did, I know, but I did, all the same."

John did not interrupt and did not answer, which was a strange thing to happen. He turned to her, but he was not there. He was not up the street; he was not down the street; he was not anywhere. At the sight of the hateful star he had disappeared—gone—vanished.

THE MYSTERY SOLVED.

His wife shrieked, waking up a widow, who pulled a fire alarm. Three policemen and a motorcycle man came running. Neighbors came out to cry and to look on. A boy ran in his nightgown to get the Bellevue ambulance. Then somebody said the vanished man must have fallen into a coal hole; the policemen found the hole, stretched themselves down in a human door, in houses and offices, the people could not see without a light. Half a dozen churches in the foreign districts were filled with praying congregations, who feared that the comet had come to bring the end of the world. It rained for a week in New York. That was ascribed to the comet, too, and some uneasy ones feared it was only the beginning of the final deluge that was to overwhelm us.

On another day, in Bermuda, it rained ink, and at least 100 Bermudians called the black stuff that fell and stained their roads and houses. The natives were stricken with downright panic at the miracle and fled to the churches. No explanation of the rain has yet been found, except that it may have been caused by volcanic ashes in the air. An earthquake struck Costa Rica, and gave it 12 shocks in 12 minutes, a slight warning of the greater disaster which overtook the town of Cartago on Wednesday. There, too, the negroes crowded the churches or gathered in cowering groups around their "voodoo" doctors, who shrieked out verbal charms and prayed their sacred dolls to save the people from the wrath of the comet.

One suicide, at least, has been caused by the comet. Louis Toma, a well-to-do land owner of Pocolz, near Budapest, in Hungary, hanged himself several weeks ago. In a note which was found after his death he said he knew that the world was to be burned to a cinder, and that he dared not live to see it. Only last week an Ohio farmer went insane and declared that the comet would finish the world on May 17, which would, he figured, sadly interfere with the state primaries which were to be held the next day. Since the time was short, he thought Mr. Bryan should be made king of the world. Bryan had tried so hard, we ought not to grudge him that small consolation, he said.

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GENERAL BOOTH'S DIRE WORD.

But many thousands of persons who would never be worried by a dozen Mme. de Thebeses have been alarmed to hear that such a kindly disposed old man as General Buller's old man, commander in chief of the Salvation Army, said to a great meeting in London:

"We are this year rapidly approaching the end of all things, with similar results, but far surpassing in horrors, any disaster that has ever gone before."

"All things will be wound up. Besides a deluge of water sweeping parts of the world and its inhabitants, there will be a fierce destruction by fire for others."

To help matters along certain newspapers have dug up a mass of semi-scientific information describing how if the earth were hit by a comet it would blow up like a firecracker, burn like a pheasant and fatten up like a squashed strawberry. It is also asserted that if the comet got within twenty million miles of us it would raise a tidal wave eleven thousand feet high, which would pull up the oceans by the roots, sweep the globe and drown all its inhabitants, except those on the tops of the Alps, the Rockies, the Andes and the Himalayas.

Then an astronomer discovered cyanogen in the comet's tail. (Cyanogen, we were reminded, is second cousin to prussic acid and to a whole family of deadly poisons, and any one of which might rain down from the sky in bucketfuls and finish us. Also, by a combination with hydrogen, it could make "laughing gas," and the human race seemed to have a fair chance of dying together in one vast manifestation of amusement. For weeks the astronomers have been busy assuring the public that the comet does not have mass enough to raise a tidal wave, and that if the earth should plough through the middle of its tail our atmosphere would not collect cyanogen enough to make a mouse drowsy.)

All these disquieting tidings have had their effect on the public mind. Most persons, of course, look upon the comet as nothing more than an interesting neighbor, but there are millions of others who will sleep sounder when it has gone by.

THERE WAS FEAR IN CHICAGO.

In Chicago a week or two ago the sky grew suddenly dark in mid-afternoon. In the streets it was like late dusk, and indoors, in houses and offices, the people could not see without a light. Half a dozen churches in the foreign districts were filled with praying congregations, who feared that the comet had come to bring the end of the world. It rained for a week in New York. That was ascribed to the comet, too, and some uneasy ones feared it was only the beginning of the final deluge that was to overwhelm us.

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When the New York seers came to prophesy, they did not agree with the Continental prophets nor with each other. The Mme. Rique, who has prophesied early and often and who once foretold a Bryan defeat, interprets it in this fashion: "The comet, with its orb of rays, will touch and break the orb of rays about the earth. Earthly affairs will be profoundly shaken. Each corner of the human triangle will be moved; political, social and religious troubles will break out. "America will feel a terrific industrial disturbance. The country will not have a foreign war, but strikes and labor troubles will rend the land. I should not be surprised to see the Union split asunder into two rival and warring nations."

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One Kills Himself and Many Others Do Odd Things Less Foolish.

felt the quickening, too, dusted out their front windows, and many of them have sold off their stocks of spyglasses, field glasses, and even opera glasses.

Already the comet, peering down into the muzzles of whole optical batteries as it looks west toward the towering homes of Manhattan. Once it has passed across the sun on May 19 and comes to shine in the evening sky, the city will bristle from end to end with glass small arms. Even now, if you should chance to be abroad among the skyscrapers at 3 o'clock of a clear morning, you may see a shining group with its hands in its pockets and its neck pulled under its overcoat collars, waiting by a levelled brass tube, and one squinting through it down the street that runs toward the dawn close by the feet of the brightening Metropolitan tower.

But the astronomers, who have spotted so many pretty fancies about the comet, have meddled even here. They say the comet is not a "telescope object" at all, but something to look at and enjoy with the naked eye. All that one needs to see it at its best is one good eye and a roof with a clear outlook to the horizon.

In New York, too, there was a rain of ink, and this one was the comet's work beyond all doubt. Every newspaper, almost every magazine, has seen its ink flowing like its river to print the full story of the comet and the story of Edmund Halley, soothsayer's words that are anything but anything, the awful things the comet may do to us, and the excellent reasons why it cannot do anything of the sort. Cut-out toys are made to show how the comet never can strike the earth.

THE "OMINOUS PERIL."

Flaming black and orange volumes about "The Ominous Peril in Our Sky" outline all the wild magazine coloring on the new-stands; inside they fairly smoke with prophecies of blood and fire.

Camille Flammarion, the French astronomer, when he was years younger than he is now, was moved in an unguarded moment to write a description of the earth being burned up by a comet. It was so lurid, so immensely, so satisfyingly ghastly, that periodicals have reprinted it ever since whenever there has been the least provocation. It is especially popular in America, because it has a scientific sound, and then, too, the Frenchman gallantly grants to a California girl the honor of sticking to her telescope longer than any other astronomer in his burning world.

Those black and orange volumes give food for an interesting supposition about comets. It behoves the superstitious that have attached to comets since the days of the patriarchs, all the plagues, earthquakes, famines, wars and the rest that have accompanied the last twenty-five appearances of Halley's particular star since the year 11 B. C., with three different ends of the world, one of which it can hardly escape this time, and then the book closes with an inscription on the last page in Latin verse.

It is the monkish Church Latin of the Middle Ages, Latin that would stand Virgil's hair on end and make him look the very twin brother of a comet, but it is Latin, notwithstanding. And this is a free translation thereof:

"Happening AFTER this or that is not the 'always happening BECAUSE' of it; so the old philosophers have told us. Use the same good rule about these comet marvels. 'But why,' you ask me, 'have you told us all this about earthquakes, floods and pestilences, screaming prophets, wars, fires and the fall of mighty monarchs?' 'The only way you can know the reason, my gentle reader, is to see it. THE WORLD LIKES TO BE TAKEN IN.'"

Hank Stubbs—I'm skittish about them airships flyin' over my house; s'pose one should come down plumb on the roof? 'Rise, Miller—I can't help thinkin' that mebbe our lightnin' rods is be some use after all.—Boston Herald.

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One Kills Himself and Many Others Do Odd Things Less Foolish.

felt the quickening, too, dusted out their front windows, and many of them have sold off their stocks of spyglasses, field glasses, and even opera glasses.

Already the comet, peering down into the muzzles of whole optical batteries as it looks west toward the towering homes of Manhattan. Once it has passed across the sun on May 19 and comes to shine in the evening sky, the city will bristle from end to end with glass small arms. Even now, if you should chance to be abroad among the skyscrapers at 3 o'clock of a clear morning, you may see a shining group with its hands in its pockets and its neck pulled under its overcoat collars, waiting by a levelled brass tube, and one squinting through it down the street that runs toward the dawn close by the feet of the brightening Metropolitan tower.

But the astronomers, who have spotted so many pretty fancies about the comet, have meddled even here. They say the comet is not a "telescope object" at all, but something to look at and enjoy with the naked eye. All that one needs to see