EDMOND HALLEY AND HIS RECURRING COMET

“They [the astronomers of the flying island of Laputa] have observed ninety-three different comets and settled their periods with great exactness. If this be true (and they affirm it with great confidence), it is much to be wished that their observations were made public, whereby the theory of comets, which at present is very lame and defective, might be brought into perfection with other parts of astronomy.”

— Jonathan Swift, GULLIVER’S TRAVELS, 1726
November 8, Saturday (Old Style): Edmond Halley was born.

Never read ahead! To appreciate November 8th, 1656 at all, one must appreciate it as a today (the following day, tomorrow, is but a portion of the unrealized future and iffy at best).
February 2, Friday (1671, Old Style): Harvard College was given a “3 foote and a halfe with a concave ey-glasse” reflecting telescope. This would be the instrument with which the Reverends Increase and Cotton Mather would observe a bright comet of the year 1682.

**ESSENCE IS BLUR. SPECIFICITY, THE OPPOSITE OF ESSENCE, IS OF THE NATURE OF TRUTH.**
Edmond Halley was for six weeks the guest of the British East India Company at their St. Helena colony in the South Atlantic for purposes of observation of the exceedingly rare transit of the planet Venus across the face of the sun. He spent most of his period on the island studying and theorizing about its hydrological cycle, upon the basis of a concept of recirculating fluid which had quite possibly been inspired by Harvey’s 1630s discovery of the recirculation of the body’s blood. We were on our way toward a new formal science in which we would not only be able to think of the planet’s surface phenomena as constituting a single self-regulating system, but also toward an abstract science of the cybernetics of self-regulating systems, neither of which had been latent within earlier patterns of thought.

Halley’s cybernetic recirculation study constitutes one of the first systematic evaluations of environmental processes and, like all others subsequent to that date, since it points in the direction of inherent limits upon exploitation rather than toward enhanced opportunities for exploitation — has been entirely ignored.

Geminiano Montanari claimed to have sighted a meteor which was making a sound. He alleged that the sound it made was like “the rattling of a great Cart running over Stones.” Since he was an astronomer, he was able to calculate that the altitude of the meteor, while he was hearing this curious rattling noise, was 38 miles.

**Essences are fuzzy, generic, conceptual; Aristotle was right when he insisted that all truth is specific and particular (and wrong when he characterized truth as a generalization).**
Edmond Halley cataloged the star Eta Carinae as one of only the 4th magnitude. (In April 1843 it would suddenly become for a period the second brightest star in the sky, and then by 1868 it would have faded to the point at which it would no longer be visible to the naked eye.) Also, in this year, the Reverend William Hubbard of Ipswich issued his A NARRATIVE OF THE TROUBLES WITH THE INDIANS IN NEW-ENGLAND, FROM THE FIRFT PLANTING THEREOF IN THE YEAR 1607, TO THIS PRESENT YEAR 1677. BUT CHIEFLY OF THE LATE TROUBLES IN THE TWO LAFT YEARS, 1675, AND 1676. TO WHICH IS ADDED A DIFCOURFE ABOUT THE WARRE WITH THE PEQUODS IN THE YEAR 1637.

Here, then, was the solution to the colonists’ dilemma ... wage the war, and win it, by whatever means necessary, and then write about it, to win it again. The first would be a victory of wounds, the second a victory of words.
NARRATIVE OF THE

Indian Wars

IN NEW ENGLAND,

From the first Planting thereof in the Year 1607, to the Year 1677,

CONTAINING

A Relation of the Occasion, Rise and Progress of the War with the Indians, in the Southern, Western, Eastern and Northern Parts of the Said Country.

By William Hubbard, a Minister of Ipswich,

And the Lord said unto Moses, write this for a Memorial in a Book. Exod. XVII. 41.

Which we have heard and known, and our Fathers have told us. That the Generation to come might know them, even the Children which should be born: Who should arise and declare them to their Children. Psal. LXXVIII. 3, 6.

PRINTED AT WORCESTER, (Massachusetts) BY DANIEL GREENLEAF, FOR JOSEPH WILDER.
Edmond Halley

The volume contained a 31 x 40 cm. “map of New-England, being the first that ever was here cut, and done by the best pattern that could be had, which being in some places defective, it made the other less exact: Yet doth it sufficiently show the situation of the country & conveniently well the distances of places.” The map was prepared by John Foster (1648-1681) and was oriented with north to the right, with relief pictorially depicted. “The figures that are joyed with the names of places are to distinguish such as have been assaulted by Indians from others.”

This map would be reissued in 1846 in Boston in conjunction with another early map, made in 1634 by William Wood, as a lithograph by William B. Fowle. These were the 1st maps to show both the Algonquian name “Musketaquid” and the English name “Concord,” for the 1st inland settlement. Copies of the original maps are at the Boston Public Library and at the Boston Athenaeum.

“Historical Perspective” being a view from a particular point in time (just as the perspective in a painting is a view from a particular point in space), to “look at the course of history more generally” would be to sacrifice perspective altogether. This is fantasy-land, you’re fooling yourself. There cannot be any such thingie, as such a perspective.
In London, Edmond Halley was elected to the Royal Society.

**Your garden-variety academic historian invites you to climb aboard a hovering time machine to skim in metatime back across the geology of our past timeslices, while offering up a garden variety of cogent assessments of our progression. What a load of crap! You should refuse this helicopterish overview of the historical past, for in the real world things happen only as they happen. What this sort writes amounts, like mere “science fiction,” merely to “history fiction”: it’s not worth your attention.**
HALLEY’S COMET

February 18, Friday (1680, Old Style): The tail of the great comet disappeared from general view. It has inspired a number of pamphlets. Most were terrified by it but it aided Isaac Newton in the study of parabolic orbits.

Memories of this “Great Comet of 1680” would add fuel to fantastical speculations by none less than Edmond Halley that the ancient Flood of Noah had been caused by the earth being drenched in the waters of a comet’s tail, and also would add fuel to a derivative speculation by a Reverend Whiston, that the earth itself had once been a comet, set to rotating by being struck by another comet:

Even while Edmond Halley was hard at work on the study that would throw open the doors of comet science, Reverend William Whiston was elaborating and adding to an unpublished speculation by Halley that an ancient comet could have caused the Flood of Noah. Not Halley’s Comet in its 1682 appearance but the great comet of 1680 was regarded, in this theory, as the possible return of the Noah comet. Now Whiston wrote The Cause of the Flood Demonstrated and his preposterous A New Theory of the Earth. In the latter, Whiston proposed the novel idea that Earth itself had once been a comet! (Another comet struck it and set it rotating.) Then in the time of Noah, the punishment of God came in the form of a disastrously close approach of the 1680 comet.

Whiston determined that the comet that caused the Flood came closest at noon, Peking time, on Monday, December 2, 2926 B.C. Unlike the earlier comet that had set the earth spinning, this one had plenty of coma and tail vapors to shroud Earth, and those vapors (claimed Whiston) condensed on our world to cover it with waters 6 miles deep. Whiston argued that the next comparable disaster would see the world destroyed by fire, and that the same comet – the Great Comet of 1680 – would again be the divine instrument of destruction. The predicted date for this holocaust, the comet’s next return, was 575 years later (an orbital period Whiston borrowed from Halley’s incorrect reckoning). Thus the world would be destroyed by fire by this comet in the year 2255. Voltaire wrote that Whiston was “unreasonable enough to be astonished that people laughed at him.” But many did not laugh, and there was panic in 1719 when some people supposed that Mars at a close, bright opposition was in fact the comet headed for Earth.

Comets were on everyone’s mind and superstitions still prevailed. But as the seventeenth century ended, Edmond Halley was pondering a certain comet, and a paper and prediction of his were about to strike the world like a lightning bolt of sanity.
The task of the historian is to create hindsight while intercepting any illusion of foresight. Nothing a human can see can ever be seen as if through the eye of God.
How many times does a “blazing exhalation” that has been appearing in the upper skies at intervals of about every 76 years at least since the year 1404 BCE have to return right on schedule, and lose another about 1/10,000ths of its mass into an awesome tail across the heavens, before anyone will notice that it is a recurring phenomenon? Well, maybe this time Edmond Halley would notice. And maybe, also, the Reverends Increase Mather and Cotton Mather would speculate on this bright comet through Harvard College’s “3 foote and a halfe with a concave ey-glasse” reflecting telescope.

This is what Halley’s Comet looked like, the last time it passed us. We have records of the appearances of this comet on each and every one of its past 30 orbits, which is to say, we have spotty records of observations before that, in 1,404 BCE, 1,057 BCE, 466 BCE, 391 BCE, and 315 BCE, but then on the 240 BCE return the sightings record begins to be complete. The Babylonians recorded seeing it in 164 BCE and again in 87 BCE, and then it was recorded as being seen in 12 BCE, 66 CE, 141 CE, 218 CE, 295 CE, 374 CE, 451 CE, 530 CE, 607 CE, 684 CE, 760 CE (only by Chinese), 837 CE, 912 CE, 989 CE, 1066, 1145, 1222, 1301, 1682, 1687, 1758, 1835, 1851, 1910, and 1986—and we are confidently awaiting sightings in 2061 and 2134 even though due to a close conjunction with the earth we are presently unable to calculate what orbit it will have by the date of that approach. Each time P/Halley orbits in out of the Kuiper belt beyond the planets Neptune and Pluto and whips around the sun, it has been throwing off about one 10,000ths of its mass into a streaming tail, which means that this comet which we know to have been visiting us for at the very least the past 3,000 years or so is only going to be visiting us for perhaps another half a million years or so!

August 20, Sunday (Old Style): John Evelyn’s diary entry for this day indicates the presence of a comet. Would it have been Halley’s Comet that he was seeing, on its way in to whip around the sun on September 15th?
... This night I saw another Comet neere Cancer, very bright, but the streame not so long:

“NARRATIVE HISTORY” AMOUNTS TO FABULATION,
THE REAL STUFF BEING MERE CHRONOLOGY

August 26, Saturday (Old Style): A hen in Marburg laid an egg “with a starry design on its shell.”
“Nothing was more common, in those days, than to interpret all meteoric appearances, and other natural phenomena that occurred with less regularity than the rise and set of sun and moon, as so many revelations from a supernatural source. Thus, a blazing spear, a sword of flame, a bow, or a sheaf of arrows seen in the midnight sky, prefigured Indian warfare. Pestilence was known to have been foreboded by a shower of crimson light. We doubt whether any marked event, for good or evil, ever befell New England, from its settlement down to revolutionary times, of which the inhabitants had not been previously warned by some spectacle of its nature. Not seldom, it had been seen by multitudes. Oftener, however, its credibility rested on the faith of some lonely eye-witness, who beheld the wonder through the coloured, magnifying, and distorted medium of his imagination, and shaped it more distinctly in his after-thought. It was, indeed, a majestic idea that the destiny of nations should be revealed, in these awful hieroglyphics, on the cope of heaven. A scroll so wide might not be deemed too expensive for Providence to write a people’s doom upon. The belief was a favourite one with our forefathers, as betokening that their infant commonwealth was under a celestial guardianship of peculiar intimacy and strictness.”

— Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter

August 29, Tuesday-September 1, Friday (Old Style): Isaac Newton sketched the positions of Halley’s Comet and its tail as it moved across Ursa Major.

“MAGISTERIAL HISTORY” IS FANTASIZING: HISTORY IS CHRONOLOGY

Edmond Halley

“Stack of the Artist of Kouroo” Project
September 15, Tuesday (Old Style): Halley's Comet whipped around the sun. On this visit it was being most carefully inspected by any number of astronomers, including Edmond Halley. The detail of the comet was most carefully observed and sketched by Christiaan Huygens. Its tail was spanning as much as 30 degrees of the sky.

LIFE IS LIVED FORWARD BUT UNDERSTOOD BACKWARD?
— NO, THAT’S GIVING TOO MUCH TO THE HISTORIAN’S STORIES. LIFE ISN’T TO BE UNDERSTOOD EITHER FORWARD OR BACKWARD.
Halley’s Comet was a publication opportunity. In this year appeared both Christopher Ness’s A STRANGE AND WONDERFUL TRINITY; OR, A TRIPLECTIC OF STUPENDOUS PRODIGIES, CONSISTING OF A WONDERFUL ECLIPSE, AS WELL AS OF A WONDERFUL COMET, AND OF A WONDERFUL CONJUNCTION [of Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars], NOW IN ITS SECOND RETURN, and the Reverend Increase Mather’s KOMETOGRAPHIA; OR, DISCOURSE CONCERNING COMETS.... Attempting to provide a catalog of appearances of all known historical comets, the Reverend cited a number of appearances that we now know to have been Halley’s Comet: he knew of the appearances during 66, 684, 837, 912, 1066, 1145, 1301, 1456, 1531, 1607, and 1682, missing the appearances it had made during 141, 218, 295, 347, 451, 530, 607, 760, 989, and 1378.

Of course, he supposed all these to be separate comets, rather than one comet returning multiple times. In this book the Reverend bound two of his sermons “occasioned by the late blasing [blasting] stars.” The Reverend’s son Cotton Mather authored an almanac article about this appearance of Halley’s Comet.

NO-ONE’S LIFE IS EVER NOT DRIVEN PRIMARILY BY HAPPENSTANCE

Edmond Halley

“Stack of the Artist of Kouroo” Project
HALLEY’S COMET

EDMOND HALLEY

The Boston Ephemeris.

An Almanack

For

The (Dionysian) Year of the Christian Era. M DC. LXXX III.

And of the World’s Creation 5632.

Anno Oppidi inchoati 53.

Of which the Vulgar Notes are.

Cyclo of the Sun 12.

Dominic, Let. G. F.

Golden Numb, 12.

Eppact 12.

Num. of Direc. 18.

Serving the Meridian of Boston in New-Engl.

Latitude, 42 gr. 30. min.

Longitude 315. 37.

Eph. 5. 16. Redeeming the Time.

Damnus flecto rerum sed multis flecto Damn in rerum

Quid potest rebus succurrere; nemo Diebus.

Boston in New-England

Printed by S. G. for S. S. 1683.

Nobody could guess what would happen next.
**Edmond Halley** saw one of his meteorological maps, of the prevailing wind currents over the oceans, published as the 1st weather map ever.

Another first in this year was the 1st survey of Nashobah Plantation near Concord. The surveyor was Samuel Danforth and the survey was not fully completed, the northern limit not being measured but being merely assumed to be four miles in length. The primary purpose of the survey was not accuracy but rather to mark out the eastern half of the reservation which had just been purchased by two local white men, Peter Bulkley of Concord (not the Reverend Peter Bulkeley, who had died in 1659, but a descendant) and Major Thomas Henchman of Chelmsford, who had paid a total of £70 to Kehonosquaw (Sarah Doublett) and the surviving sister of the old sachem John Tahattawan and Naanishcow (the teacher John Thomas) with his spouse Naanasquaw.

In Concord, John Flint continued to be the Town Clerk.

In Concord, Edward Oakes was deputy and representative to the General Court.

Note that according to the history of Concord published in 1835 by Lemuel Shattuck (A HISTORY OF THE TOWN OF CONCORD...), nothing of any great importance was going to happen in Concord for the following half century:

> During the fifty subsequent years few important events mark the history of the town. The generation who first emigrated from England had nearly all departed, and others taken their places; but with habits and education somewhat different from their fathers and peculiar to their own period. Compelled to labor hard to supply their own necessities, parents had little time or ability to educate their children and the people generally were, in consequence, less enlightened than the first settlers. More signed legal instruments by their marks at this than at any other period. Their history (and such is the history of the country generally) exhibits this as the dark age of New England. Superstition and supposed *witchcraft* now prevailed. Concord, however, was not a *bewitched* town; it never took a part in that horrible delusion. The increase in numbers, wealth and intellectual improvement of the people, was subsequently slow
but progressive.

THE FUTURE IS MOST READILY PREDICTED IN RETROSPECT
Edmond Halley corrected the proofs of Sir Isaac Newton’s *PRINCIPIA MATHEMATICA*, which stated the law of universal gravitation that would make possible long-range eclipse prediction (he failed to catch one blunder).

(Newton’s 1st Law of Motion already had been obvious to Chinese physicists of the 3rd Century — that’s the 3rd Century BCE, by the way.)

**DO I HAVE YOUR ATTENTION? GOOD.**

Edmond Halley

“Stack of the Artist of Kouroo” Project
Edmond Halley’s observations on the hydrological cycle, made in 1676 on St. Helena, were finally published. (It is to be noted that this concept of recirculating fluid had quite possibly been inspired by William Harvey’s 1630s discovery of the recirculation of the body’s blood. We were on our way toward a new formal science in which we would not only be able to think of the planet’s surface phenomena as constituting a single self-regulating system, but also toward an abstract science of the cybernetics of self-regulating systems, neither of which had been latent within earlier patterns of thought.)

Figuring out what amounts to a “historical context” is what the craft of historicizing amounts to, and this necessitates distinguishing between the set of events that must have taken place before Event E could become possible, and most carefully distinguishing them from another set of events that could not possibly occur until subsequent to Event E.
Edmond Halley described Robert Hooke’s final invention, a marine telescope, to the Royal Society.

**HISTORY OF OPTICS**

**ONE COULD BE ELSEWHERE, AS ELSEWHERE DOES EXIST.**
**ONE CANNOT BE ELSEWHEN SINCE ELSEWHEN DOES NOT.**
*(TO THE WILLING MANY THINGS CAN BE EXPLAINED, THAT FOR THE UNWILLING WILL REMAIN FOREVER MYSTERIOUS.)*
Edmond Halley inferred that the bright comets of the years 1531, 1607, and 1682 were reappearances of the same entity, and correctly predicted on this basis that this bright comet would return in 1758.
Edmond Halley staked his professional reputation by publishing a prediction that the comet of 1682 would be back in 1758.

In this year the Earl of Halifax requested that Isaac Newton be knighted in order to increase Newton’s chances for election to Parliament in Halifax’s interest. Halley, who was quite as deserving of knighthood as Newton, was not being sponsored by any noble and was not standing for election — so, England being England, it wouldn’t ever occur to anyone to recommend him for knighthood (possessing a bachelor’s degree from Oxford, he would in 1710 in his standing as the Savilian Professor of Geometry there on the recommendation of the Chancellor of the university, who was the Duke of Ormonde, be recognized with the honorary degree of Doctor of Civil Laws, and since he was not wealthy all the fees for this would in his circumstance be waived).

**YOU HAVE TO ACCEPT EITHER THE REALITY OF TIME OVER THAT OF CHANGE, OR CHANGE OVER TIME — IT’S PARMENIDES, OR HERACLITUS. I HAVE GONE WITH HERACLITUS.**
Edmond Halley assured the Royal Society that it would be readily possible to obtain an approximate figure for the age of the planet Earth, because the saltiness of ocean water was the result of salts carried into it by streams and rivers. All one would need to do was compare the total salt in the oceans of the earth—easily approximated by multiplying the saltiness of an average seawater sample by the total volume of the oceans—with the rate at which additional salt was being carried into it at the present time! (His calculation of course presumed that the oceans never lost any of their salt, which of course can only be very false—as enormous deposits of solid salt are known to be buried within the crust of the earth.)

May 3, Tuesday (Old Style): A total eclipse of the sun was visible from the town of London. There had not been such a total eclipse of the sun visible from London since March 20, 1140.1 It was during this eclipse that Edmond Halley observed the phenomenon that would become known as “Baily’s Beads,” a manifestation we now understand to be caused by the light of the occulted sun shining through the valleys between the mountains along the limb of the moon.

1. By way of contrast, in accordance with the statistical law of probabilities there ought to be approximately one total solar eclipse visible in a given town for every four centuries.—But this law of probabilities cuts both ways, for in the Brisbane region of Australia, in 1856-1857, two total solar eclipses would occur less than a year apart!
Edmond Halley noted that the supposedly fixed stars Sirius, Aldebaran, and Arcturus were no longer in the positions in which they had been observed in the 2d century of the Common Era by Ptolemy and Hipparchus. These supposedly fixed stars were actually moving in relation to the others!

Go figure.

A tailless comet passed but 0.11 astronomical units away from Earth. It was moving at an apparent rate of nearly two degrees per hour, in the constellation of Ursa Minor.

Between any two moments are an infinite number of moments, and between these other moments likewise an infinite number, there being no atomic moment just as there is no atomic point along a line. Moments are therefore figments. The present moment is a moment and as such is a figment, a flight of the imagination to which nothing real corresponds. Since past moments have passed out of existence and future moments have yet to arrive, we note that the present moment is all that ever exists — and yet the present moment being a moment is a figment to which nothing in reality corresponds.
Halley’s Comet

Edmond Halley

1721

At the age of 64, Edmond Halley succeeded Professor Flamsteed as England’s astronomer royal.

Flamsteed’s widow having removed all the instruments from the Greenwich Observatory, Robert Hooke and George Graham constructed a 5-foot transit instrument, the first transit instrument in England, for Halley’s use. The new astronomer royal would make an extended series of observations of the moon and would measure but be unable to explain an observed acceleration in its mean motion.

Edmond Halley

“Stack of the Artist of Koureo” Project
In *Gulliver’s Travels*, Jonathan Swift alluded to the prediction that had been made by Edmond Halley, that the comet of 1682 would be returning in 1758.

“They [the astronomers of the flying island of Laputa] have observed ninety-three different comets and settled their periods with great exactness. If this be true (and they affirm it with great confidence), it is much to be wished that their observations were made public, whereby the theory of comets, which at present is very lame and defective, might be brought into perfection with other parts of astronomy.”

— Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*, 1726
Halley’s Comet

Edmond Halley

TRAVELS
INTO SEVERAL
Remote Nations
OF THE
WORLD.

By Captain Lemuel Gulliver.

PART I.
A Voyage to Lilliput.

London:
Printed in the Year, MDCCXXVI.
One Morning, about a Fortnight after I had obtained my Liberty, Reldresal, Principal Secretary (as they style him) of private Affairs, came to my House, attended only by one Servant. He ordered his Coach to wait at a distance, and desired I would give him an Hour’s Audience; which I readily consented to, on account of his Quality, and Personal Merits, as well as the many good Offices he had done me during my Sollicitations at Court. I offered to lie down, that he might the more conveniently reach my Ear; but he chose rather to let me hold him in my hand during our Conversation. He began with Compliments on my Liberty; said he might pretend to some Merit in it: but, however, added, that if it had not been for the present Situation of things at Court, perhaps I might not have obtained it so soon. For, said he, as flourishing a Condition as we may appear to be in to Foreigners, we labor under two mighty Evils; a violent Faction at home, and the Danger of an Invasion by a most potent Enemy from abroad. As to the first, you are to understand, that for above seventy Moons past there have been two struggling Parties in this Empire, under the Names of Tramecksan and Slamecksan, from the high and low Heels on their shoes, by which they distinguish themselves. It is alleged indeed, that the high Heels are most agreeable to our ancient Constitution: But however this be, his Majesty has determined to make use of only low Heels in the Administration of the Government, and all Offices in the Gift of the Crown, as you cannot but observe; and particularly, that his Majesty’s Imperial Heels are lower at least by a Drurr than any of his Court; (Drurr is a Measure about the fourteenth Part of an Inch). The Animosities between these two Parties run so high, that they will neither eat nor drink, nor talk with each other. We compute the Tramecksan, or High-Heels, to exceed us in number; but the Power is wholly on our Side. We apprehend his Imperial Highness, the Heir to the Crown, to have some Tendency towards the High-Heels; at least we can plainly discover one of his Heels higher than the other, which gives him a Hobble in his Gait. Now, in the midst of these intestine Disquiets, we are threatened with an Invasion from the Island of Blefuscu, which is the other great Empire of the Universe, almost as large and powerful as this of his Majesty. For as to what we have heard you affirm, that there are other Kingdoms and States in the World inhabited by human Creatures as large as yourself, our Philosophers are in much doubt, and would rather conjecture that you dropt from the Moon, or one of the Stars; because it is certain, that a hundred Mortals of your Bulk would, in a short time, destroy all the Fruits and Cattle of his Majesty’s Dominions. Besides, our Histories of six thousand Moons make no mention of any other Regions, than the two great Empires of Lilliput and Blefuscu. Which two mighty Powers have, as I was going to tell you, been engaged in a most obstinate War for six and thirty Moons past. It began upon the following Occasion. It is allowed on all Hands, that the primitive way of breaking Eggs, before we eat them, was upon the larger End: But his present Majesty’s Grand-father, while he was a Boy, going to eat an Egg, and breaking it according to the ancient Practice, happened to cut one of his Fingers. Whereupon the Emperor his Father
published an Edict, commanding all his Subjects, upon great Penaltys, to break the smaller End of their Eggs. The People so highly resented this Law, that our Histories tell us there have been six Rebellions raised on that account; wherein one Emperor lost his Life, and another his Crown. These civil Commotions were constantly fomented by the Monarchs of Blefuscu; and when they were quelled, the Exiles always fled for Refuge to that Empire. It is computed, that eleven thousand Persons have, at several times, suffered Death, rather than submit to break their Eggs at the smaller End. Many hundred large Volumes have been published upon this Controversy: But the books of the Big-Endians have been long forbidden, and the whole Party rendered incapable by Law of holding Employments. During the Course of these Troubles, the Emperors of Blefuscu did frequently expostulate by their Ambassadors, accusing us of making a Schism in Religion, by offending against a fundamental Doctrine of our great Prophet Lustrog, in the fifty-fourth Chapter of the Brundrecal (which is their Alcoran.) This, however, is thought to be a meer Strain upon the Text: For the Words are these: That all true Believers shall break their Eggs at the convenient End; and which is the convenient End, seems, in my humble Opinion, to be left to every Man’s Conscience, or at least in the power of the Chief Magistrate to determine. Now the Big-Endian Exiles have found so much Credit in the Emperor of Blefuscus’s Court, and so much private Assistance and Encouragement from their Party here at home, that a bloody War has been carried on between the two Empires for six and thirty Moons with various Success; during which time we have lost forty Capital Ships, and a much greater number of smaller Vessels, together with thirty thousand of our best Seamen and Soldiers; and the Damage received by the Enemy is reckon’d to be somewhat greater than Ours. However, they have now equipped a numerous Fleet, and are just preparing to make a Descent upon us; and his Imperial Majesty, placing great Confidence in your Valour and Strength, has commanded me to lay this Account of his affairs before you.
Halley's Comet

Edmond Halley
January 14, Thursday (Old Style): Edmond Halley died.
A natural philosopher (scientist) you may not have heard of, Jacques Gautier, predicted that Edmond Halley would be proven wrong. His comet would not be returning as predicted — for such apparitions were mere movements within our atmosphere — clearly they were mere local meteorological phenomena.
November 1, Saturday, All Saints Day: Three earthquake jolts estimated at magnitude 8.6-9.0 on the Richter scale, followed by three tsunami\(^2\) and a fire, devastated the city of Lisbon in Portugal, the coast of the Iberian peninsula from Galicia to Andalusia, and the coast of Morocco. It seems likely that approximately 30,000 people, 11% of the population, were killed and over 90,000 buildings destroyed.

...Her story was as full of desperation and despair as her limited acquaintance with those uncomfortable emotions enabled her to make it, and having located it in Lisbon, she wound up with an earthquake, as a striking and appropriate \textit{dénouement}. The manuscript was privately despatched, accompanied by a note, modestly saying that if the tale didn’t get the prize, which the writer hardly dared expect, she would be very glad to receive any sum it might be considered worth.

Seventeen hundred and fifty-five.
\textit{Georgius Secundus} was then alive, —
Snuffy old drone from the German hive.
That was the year when Lisbon-town
Saw the earth open and gulp her down,
And Braddock’s army was done so brown,
Left without a scalp to its crown.
It was on that terrible Earthquake-day
That the Deacon finished the one-horse shay.\(^3\)

The Reverend John Wesley (1730-1791) would soon be suggesting in his \textsc{Serious Thoughts Occasioned by the Late Earthquake at Lisbon} that if \textit{Halley’s Comet} did return as predicted, this time it might set the earth on fire.

\[\text{HALLEY’S COMET} \quad \text{EDMOND HALLEY} \]

\[\text{1755} \]

\[\text{SKY EVENT} \]

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\(^2\) These temblors had occurred along a plate boundary on the ocean floor, between the mid-Atlantic ridge and the Azores. For a comparison event within our own timeframe: [http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/indonesia/aceh-andaman-tsunami-imagery.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/indonesia/aceh-andaman-tsunami-imagery.htm)

\(^3\) From Oliver Wendell Holmes’s “The Deacon’s Masterpiece; or, The Wonderful ‘One-Hoss Shay.’ A Logical Story.”
A bright comet was visible in the twilight, only a few degrees away from the disk of the sun (this one wasn’t Halley’s).  

**THE FALLACY OF MOMENTISM: THIS STARRY UNIVERSE DOES NOT CONSIST OF A SEQUENCE OF MOMENTS. THAT IS A FIGMENT, ONE WE HAVE RECURS TO IN ORDER TO PRIVILEGE TIME OVER CHANGE, A PRIVILEGING THAT MAKES CHANGE SEEM UNREAL, DERIVATIVE, A MERE APPAREANCE. IN FACT IT IS CHANGE AND ONLY CHANGE WHICH WE EXPERIENCE AS REALITY, TIME BEING BY WAY OF RADICAL CONTRAST UNEXPERIENCED — A MERE INTELLECTUAL CONSTRUCT. THERE EXISTS NO SUCH THING AS A MOMENT. NO INSTANT HAS EVER FOR AN INSTANT EXISTED.**

In this year Voltaire was mocking the astronomers as not daring to go to bed for fear they would miss the return of their precious Halley’s Comet.

**THE AGE OF REASON WAS A PIPE DREAM, OR AT BEST A PROJECT. ACTUALLY, HUMANS HAVE ALMOST NO CLUE WHAT THEY ARE DOING, WHILE CREDITING THEIR OWN LIES ABOUT WHY THEY ARE DOING IT.**
December 25, Monday night: Edmund Halley’s prediction of 1704 was confirmed, when the bright comet which had been observed in the years 1531, 1607, 1682, and 1698 reappeared in the winter skies. The best calculations possible during this epoch had proved a month off—because they had been using incorrect estimates for the masses of Jupiter and Saturn. Thus it was an amateur, Johann Georg Palitzsch, who first spotted Halley’s Comet, returning as predicted.

Unfortunately, Halley wasn’t able to make an appearance at the party in his honor or collect on any bets he may have taken, as at this point he’d already been dead for some 16 years.¹

This is what Halley’s Comet looked like, the last time it passed us. We have records of the appearances of this comet on each and every one of its past 30 orbits, which is to say, we have spotty records of observations before that, in 1,404 BCE, 1,057 BCE, 466 BCE, 391 BCE, and 315 BCE, but then on the 240 BCE return the sightings record begins to be complete. The Babylonians recorded seeing it in 164 BCE and again in 87 BCE, and then it was recorded as being seen in 12 BCE, 66 CE, 141 CE, 218 CE, 295 CE, 374 CE, 451 CE, 530 CE, 607 CE, 684 CE, 760 CE (only by Chinese), 837 CE, 912 CE, 989 CE, 1066, 1145, 1222, 1301, 1378, 1456, 1531, 1607, 1682, 1758, 1835, 1910, and 1986—and we are confidently awaiting sightings in 2061 and 2134 even though due to a close conjunction with the earth we are presently unable to calculate what orbit it will have by the date of that approach. Each time P/Halley orbits in out of the Kuiper belt beyond the planets Neptune and Pluto and whips around the sun, it has been throwing off about one 10,000ths of its mass into a streaming tail, which means that this comet which we know to have been visiting us for at the very least the past 3,000 years or so is only going to be visiting us for perhaps another half a million years or so!

¹. Later, it would be added that P/Halley’s was the same comet as had appeared in the heavens above the invading Norman French in 1066 CE and which they depicted in the Bayeux Tapestry, and its previous visits would be traced all the way back to 1404 BCE.
Nathan Davis of Acton, son of Samuel Davis, graduated at Harvard College. He would be ordained as the minister at Dracut on November 20, 1765, be dismissed there in 1785, remove to Boston, and be appointed as the chaplain at Fort Independence, and a review officer. He would die on March 4th, 1803, at the age of 65.

Professor of Mathematics and Physics John Winthrop at Harvard published Two Lectures on Comets, which he had delivered to popular audiences in Boston, in which he correctly predicted that a comet seen in 1682, called “Halley’s Comet,” would return and again be seen.

March 13, Tuesday: Halley’s Comet whipped around the sun. It would come closer to the earth after its perihelion, at 0.1222 astronomical units, and would have seemed quite bright, except for the fact that this time it was passing under the earth and was visible mostly from the southern hemisphere where there weren’t nearly so many observers.
This is what Halley’s Comet looked like, the last time it passed us. We have records of the appearances of this comet on each and every one of its past 30 orbits, which is to say, we have spotty records of observations before that, in 1,404 BCE, 1,057 BCE, 466 BCE, 391 BCE, and 315 BCE, but then on the return the sightings record begins to be complete. The Babylonians recorded seeing it in 164 BCE and again in 87 BCE, and then it was recorded as being seen in 12 BCE, 66 CE, 141 CE, 218 CE, 295 CE, 374 CE, 451 CE, 530 CE, 607 CE, 684 CE, 760 CE (only by Chinese), 837 CE, 912 CE, 989 CE, 1066, 1145, 1222, 1301, 1378, 1456, 1531, 1607, 1682, 1758, 1835, 1910, and 1986 — and we are confidently awaiting sightings in 2061 and 2134 even though due to a close conjunction with the earth we are presently unable to calculate what orbit it will have by the date of that approach. Each time P/Halley orbits in out of the Kuiper belt beyond the planets Neptune and Pluto and whips around the sun, it has been throwing off about one 10,000ths of its mass into a streaming tail, which means that this comet which we know to have been visiting us for at the very least the past 3,000 years or so is only going to be visiting us for perhaps another half a million years or so!
March 31, Saturday: Halley’s Comet was observed by Messer, low in the morning twilight.⁵

⁵ At one point during this year a non-periodic comet whizzed by the earth at only 0.07 astronomical units, traveling at the speed of a degree an hour. (Differentiate in your mind between this one and Halley’s.)
April 1, Sunday: Halley’s Comet was again observed low in the morning twilight by Messer. It had a 25-degree tail. Since King Kamehameha I of Hawaii would be reputed to have been born on a night during which “a strange star with a tail of white fire” was appearing in the western heavens, he may well have been born at about this date: although there is no chance that this notorious periodic comet functioned as the “Star of Bethlehem” as of 12 BCE, as of 1759 CE it may well have functioned as the “Star of Aloha”!
Although Edmond Halley had cataloged the star Eta Carinae in 1677 as one of only the 4th magnitude, and during the early 19th century it had been a run-of-the-mill variable star, sometimes appearing at 4th magnitude, sometimes at 2d, in this year it rose to 1st magnitude. We can now use the Hubble Space Telescope to inspect what had been happening:
October: Regular as clockwork, the return of the comet which had been observed by the Reverends Increase Mather and Cotton Mather through Harvard College’s “3 foote and a halfe with a concave ey-glasse” reflecting telescope in 1682, the comet which is known as “Halley’s” to commoners and as “P/Halley” to others.

It would be during this appearance of Halley’s Comet that it would first be hypothesized that the outgassing from comets must be shoving them around, perturbing their orbital motion, and also, Newton to the contrary notwithstanding, causing them to lose mass toward their eventual disintegration.⁶

This time, Maria Mitchell and her father recorded the movements of this periodic comet.

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⁶ All the initial calculations of the magnitude and directionality of this phenomenon, however, would prove to have been way, way off.
This is what Halley’s Comet looked like, the last time it passed us. We have records of the appearances of this comet on each and every one of its past 30 orbits, which is to say, we have spotty records of observations before that, in 1,404 BCE, 1,057 BCE, 466 BCE, 391 BCE, and 315 BCE, but then on the 240 BCE return the sightings record begins to be complete. The Babylonians recorded seeing it in 164 BCE and again in 87 BCE, and then it was recorded as being seen in 12 BCE, 66 CE, 141 CE, 218 CE, 295 CE, 374 CE, 451 CE, 530 CE, 607 CE, 684 CE, 760 CE (only by Chinese), 837 CE, 912 CE, 989 CE, 1066, 1145, 1222, 1301, 1378, 1456, 1531, 1607, 1682, 1758, 1835, 1910, and 1986 — and we are confidently awaiting sightings in 2061 and 2134 even though due to a close conjunction with the earth we are presently unable to calculate what orbit it will have by the date of that approach. Each time P/Halley orbits in out of the Kuiper belt beyond the planets Neptune and Pluto and whips around the sun, it has been throwing off about one 10,000ths of its mass into a streaming tail, which means that this comet which we know to have been visiting us for at the very least the past 3,000 years or so is only going to be visiting us for perhaps another half a million years or so!

Elizabeth Hallett Prichard viewed this comet as a child in Concord (she would view it again as an old woman). This magazine illustration would undoubtedly have been somewhat exaggerated:
October 15, Thursday: Richard Henry Dana, Jr. reminisced with old buddies (a favorite pastime of his: we could utilize him as the type case of homosociality) from the days of the “hide crew” who lived ashore in San Diego.

During this period Halley’s Comet was appearing 60 degrees north of the sun. Because of its positioning this time, it would be visible all night every night crossing the northern sky. Its tail would grow to 30 degrees.

AND NOW, FOR SOMETHING ENTIRELY DIFFERENT, A REPORT FROM OUR SAILOR:

Thursday, Oct. 15th. Found here the Italian ship La Rosa, from the windward, which reported the brig Pilgrim at San Francisco, all well. Everything was as quiet here as usual. We discharged our hides, horns, and tallow, and were ready to sail again on the following Sunday. I went ashore to my old quarters, and found the gang at the hide-house going on in the even tenor of their way, and spent an hour or two, after dark, at the oven, taking a whiff with my old Kanaka friends, who really seemed glad to see me again, and saluted me as the Aikane of the Kanakas. I was grieved to find that my poor dog Bravo was dead. He had sickened and died suddenly, the very day after I sailed in the Alert.

CONTINGENCY

ALTHOUGH VERY MANY OUTCOMES ARE OVERDETERMINED, WE TRUST THAT SOMETIMES WE ACTUALLY MAKE REAL CHOICES.
HALLEY’S COMET

EDMOND HALLEY

October 29, Thursday: In about this time frame, in New-York, the three Hecker brothers, including Isaac Hecker, were becoming active “Loco-Focos,” that is, they were affiliating politically with the Radical Democrats who opposed not only the state banks but also the Bank of the United States, and condemned the issuance of a paper currency. This, in the period, was considered to be Jeffersonianism.

As Halley’s Comet plunged toward the skies of the Southern Hemisphere on its way in toward the sun, it was coming within the view of Sir John Herschel at his station in South Africa.

This was the night on which the famous Tammany fringe political meeting occurred in New-York, at which as a prank pro-administration forces turned off the gaslight, and the assembled citizens were forced to light and hold up the “locofoco” friction match of the period in order to continue (then they also found themselves some candles). Conservative Democrats of New York State would begin to refer derisively to a fringe branch of their party, the Radical Democrats, as “locofocos,” because of this prank at this meeting. This term of abuse would be picked up by the Whigs and generalized to mean any Democrat.

HISTORY’S NOT MADE OF WOULD. WHEN SOMEONE REVEALS, FOR INSTANCE, THAT A PARTISAN TERM WOULD BE PICKED UP AND
HALLEY’S COMET

EDMOND HALLEY

PERMUTED BY THE OPPOSITION PARTY, S/HE DISCLOSES THAT WHAT IS BEING CRAFTED IS NOT REALITY BUT PREDESTINARIANISM. THE RULE OF REALITY IS THAT THE FUTURE HASN’T EVER HAPPENED, YET. AT THIS POINT NOBODY KNOWS AS YET HOW THIS USAGE “WOOD” DEVELOP.

November 16, Monday: Halley’s Comet whipped around the sun and was, for more than a week, lost to view.7

Friend Stephen Wanton Gould wrote in his journal:

2nd day 16th of 11th M / Thos Anthony has spent a little time with us this morning but has gone to Wm Nichols’s to dine by invitation The Wind being high, he could not get up the River & lodged again with us. —

November 30, Monday: Samuel Langhorn Clemens was born in the town of Florida, near Hannibal, Missouri.

David Henry Thoreau passed the final examination in French at Harvard College.

Edmond Halley

“Stack of the Artist of Kouroo” Project

7. “P/HALLEY, (1P=1835 III). Viewed with the unaided eye from September 23 until February 18th, T=1835 November 16. First detected without optical aid on September 23 when situated in the morning sky in eastern Auriga. Moved swiftly to the northeast. By October 5 already 3rd magnitude. Beginning October 8, visible all night as a 1-2 magnitude object in Ursa Major. Passed through solar conjunction far north of the Sun, entering the evening sky. On October 14 located in northernmost Bootes, 1st magnitude with a 20 degree tail. By October 20 situated in Ophiuchus, magnitude 1-2 and still with an impressive tail. In the first half of November about 2nd magnitude, drifting slowly to the southwest and then entering the evening twilight. Following solar conjunction reported as about 2nd magnitude at the very end of January 1836 — about 30-50 times brighter than expected! Comet situated a little southwest of Antares. Throughout the first half of February seen as a steadily fading naked eye object.” According to a comet list published in Boston in 1846, attributed to Professor Benjamin Peirce:
January 1, Friday: During this general period Halley’s Comet was in the constellation of Scorpius. As the comet would recede in the heavens, Sir John Herschel from his South Africa location would be well positioned to observe and sketch an entirely unexpected and most blazing amazing display. As the comet fled, Frederick Douglass made a new years resolution:

“By this date next year I will be a free man!”

Friend Stephen Wanton Gould wrote in his journal, mentioning that he was in the process of writing to Friend Moses Brown:

6th day 1st of 1st M 1836 / It has been a pleasant day as to the outward, & norm [?] in the inward to render it otherwise -called in the Afternoon to visit my cousins Henry & Thos Gould in their respective Mills - & this evening wrote a letter to my dear Ancient friend Moses Brown.8

8. Stephen Wanton Gould Diary, 1833-1838: The Gould family papers are stored under control number 2033 at the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections of Cornell University Library, Box 9 Folder 15: January 1, 1833-August 28, 1836; Box 9 Folder 16: September 1, 1836-September 20, 1838; also on microfilm, see Series 7
Last week in January: During the last week in January Halley’s Comet rose away from the sun and past the earth and arrived at about the orbit of Mars. Suddenly there was a magnificent outburst and the comet began sending out an expanding halo. With its tail no longer visible even by telescope, this halo was dramatic, and could be watched as within about three weeks it would expand to at least a million miles in diameter. Sir John Herschel would write of the expanding halo as resembling “a transparent gauze or alabaster vase illuminated from within.” (It has been suggested that such a surge as this comet exhibited in 1836 may also have happened in 607 CE, 1066 CE, and 1145 CE, due to some volatile spot on the body of the comet that was becoming turned toward the sun at this precise point between 63 and 77 days after perihelion.)
February 2, Tuesday: By a decree of the government, Gaetano Donizetti was made a chevalier of the French Legion of Honor.

Defeated as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention from his home town of Nacogdoches, Sam Houston was elected from the Refugio District.

At the Alamo, Colonel James Bowie and Neill vowed that they would “rather die in these ditches than give it up to the enemy.” (Were not these defenders noticing the strange glowing ball of the departing Halley’s Comet in the southern skies, and wondering what this comet had tried to tell them?)
Lieutenant Colonel William B. Travis arrived at the Alamo with 30 brave, self-sacrificing white men.

**March 26, Saturday:** At the Theatre de la Bourse in Paris, Daniel-Francois-Esprit Auber’s opera comique Les chaperons blanc to words of Scribe was performed for the initial time.

**May 20, Friday:** Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello went back onto the Virginia real estate market, on a plot of 218 acres. This time the mansion would be purchased for $2,700 by Lieutenant Uriah Phillips Levy of the US Navy, a bachelor from Philadelphia (Levy would proceed to accumulate more surrounding acreage and would transform the estate into his family’s vacation home).

At this point Halley’s Comet, which had been invisible to the naked eye since late March, was fading out — even for Sir John Herschel still watching it faithfully through his telescope in South Africa.
April: Although Edmond Halley had cataloged the star Eta Carinae in 1677 as one of only the 4th magnitude, and during the early 19th century, Eta Carinae had been a run-of-the-mill variable star, sometimes appearing at 4th magnitude, sometimes at 2d, in 1827, in 1832, and in December 1837 it had risen to 1st magnitude, at this point it suddenly brightened so remarkably, to a magnitude of -1, as to become the 2d brightest star in the sky, outshone only by Sirius. For the next two decades, Eta Carinae would be one of the brightest stars in the galaxy. This would be the only nova event that would be visible during Henry Thoreau’s lifetime. Accompanying this brightening was an expulsion of materials two to three times the weight of our sun from Eta Carinae’s polar regions. This material was forming the two lobes now seen in the Hubble view. The glow from these lobes comes mainly from light radiated by Eta Carinae that reflects off the dust of the lobes. The clouds that surround Eta Carinae obscure it from our direct visual observation. According to observations, the Great Eruption appeared to end in 1863 when the star faded in spurts to below naked-eye visibility, stabilizing at about 7th magnitude. Eta Carinae then brightened to 6th and faded back to a dim 8th magnitude. By 1868 it was no longer visible to the naked eye. From 1950 to 1992 the star brightened by a full magnitude, and it is continuing to brighten. In November 1999 its brightness was 4.8 magnitudes, something not seen in this star since the Great Eruption of April 1843.
April 20, Wednesday/21, Thursday: Regular as clockwork, the 3d whip around the sun as had been predicted by Edmond Halley in 1704 of the comet which had been observed by the Reverends Increase Mather and Cotton Mather through Harvard College’s “3 foote and a halfe with a concave ey-glasse” reflecting telescope in 1682, the comet which is known as “P/Halley” to the initiated and as “Halley’s Comet” to the unwashed. It would be during this appearance that it would be possible to calculate in advance the date of its perihelion (the point at which it would come closest to the sun, some 55,000,000 miles, which is not really all that much on target) within a margin of error of three days. It was announced in the popular press that this time the million-kilometer tail of the comet would sweep across Earth’s orbit, and a “comet pill” was marketed as an antidote for the comet’s poisonous gasses.9

**Halley’s Comet is sometimes called ”the comet of all lifetimes,” or “mankind’s comet,” because the length of its orbit brings it within sight of the earth about every seventy-five years – the approximate length of one human lifetime. Most people who live to adulthood have the opportunity to view it.**

Samuel Langhorn Clemens, who had been born in Missouri while the comet was departing in 1835, died on this day during this next passage of the comet. The biologist Sewall Wright witnessed this visit of this comet while working on the railroads in South Dakota, and would endure to mark its disappointing performance upon its well-anticipated next visit in 1985-1986.

**Elizabeth Hallett Prichard Hoar**, as she gazed up at the night sky from her window, would remember that this was an apparition she had previously witnessed, as a girl in Concord.

On its trip back out into the cold dark the comet would come within 0.15 astronomical units of the earth, and in all probability the earth did pass through its 120-degree tail of gas and dust.

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9. This pill would prove to be quite effective, so effective in fact that it would work even for those who neglected to procure it.
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May 10, Saturday: Many people in Rochester, New York were disappointed on this day having been given to understand that they would be able to see Halley’s Comet (the comet would come closest as it passed between Earth and the sun, on the 18th).

May 17, Tuesday: Mme. Haydee Bouyard of Gard noted, on the shell of one of the eggs she was taking from the nests of her chickens, an image of Halley’s Comet.
HALLEY’S COMET

May 18, Wednesday: As Halley’s Comet made its closest approach to the earth this time, passing between the planet and the sun, many people were believing that its arrival heralded the End of the World — some were supposing that cyanide gas in the tail was going to poison the atmosphere. “Comet pills” were offered that would render the purchasing population immune to such toxins. In Germany one might purchase a postcard which depicted apocalyptic scenes, captioned “End of the World on May 18” (Weber, Eugen. APOCALYPSES. Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1999, page 196-198, Abanes, Richard. END-TIME VISIONS. NY: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1998, page 339).

Meanwhile, at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Study of the Feeble-Minded in Lincoln, Illinois, Henry H. Goddard was proposing that his colleagues become more scientific in the pejorative terms they were employing in regard to the individuals under their care: the least impaired among them, he proposed, should be precisely derogated as “morons,” the more impaired as “imbeciles,” with “idiot” reserved to only the most impaired. His proposal would be accepted as a standardized nomenclature.10

May 19, Thursday: US forces would protect American interests at Bluefields, Nicaragua until September 4th.

Had Earth passed through the tail of Halley’s Comet as its nucleus was passing across the face of the sun? It may well have — but of course the tails of comets are so utterly tenuous that such an event could not be generally noticed. There was public reaction, as in the case of a sheep rancher in California who managed to do a considerable amount of harm to himself by hanging himself upon a cross. One self-promoter again came up with the perennial notion that this comet, having appeared in 12 BCE, equated to the “Star of Bethlehem,” and announced that this time the comet heralded the Second Coming of Christ Incarnate.

Elsewhere, a suicide left a note that he was offing himself so as not to be “killed by a star.” It is probably not true, but mere media hype, that in Oklahoma some cultists were intercepted just short of sacrificing one of their virgins to the comet, but in fact some Wisconsin farmers had temporarily taken down their lightning rods. Miners in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania had refused to enter the mines on the 18th, the day on which it had been announced that Earth was passing through the comet’s tail. On the bright side, Luigi Ciefice, who was in the hoosegow in Newark on charges of having attempted to blackmail Enrico Caruso, was encouraged by his fear of the comet’s tail to confess a murder and reveal to his interrogators the spot at which he had buried the body (calculations indicate that the tail missed us by maybe less than the distance of the moon, but there were some unconfirmed reports of apparent high noctiluminescent clouds, and of suspicious sky glows).

May 23, Monday-24, Tuesday, night: Due to a total eclipse of the moon, the display of Halley’s Comet in the evening sky was truly to die for. At Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, the undergraduates were heard to be cheering wildly (then as now, any excuse for a party).

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Regular as clockwork, the 4th return as had been predicted by Edmond Halley in 1704 of the comet which had been observed by the Reverends Increase Mather and Cotton Mather through Harvard College’s “3 foote and a halfe with a concave ey-glasse” reflecting telescope in 1682, the comet which is known as “Halley’s” to commoners and as “P/Halley” to others. It would be during this appearance of Halley’s Comet that it would attract visitors: it would be met by two Vega and one Giotto spacecraft, from the USSR and from Europe, which would pass near its head and take many photographs.

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February 9, Sunday: Halley’s Comet whipped around the sun:

March 14, Friday: Our spacecraft Giotto flew by the nucleus of Halley’s Comet. The nucleus turns out to be black and somewhat hilly, porous, and ellipsoidal. It was at this point five miles by ten miles in size, and it was tumbling end over end each 52.2 hours, and meanwhile spiraling by one revolution each 7.4 days. Up to seven enormous spouts of gas and dust were found to be being expelled from cavities in its body during this pass as it heated in the rays of Sol, and it was blowing away its substance at the rate of 3 tons of dust and between 21 and 60 tons of gas and water vapor each second.\footnote{The miserable iceball put on a miserable show this time through. However, since this visitor is due to drop back through our neighborhood again in the year 2061 CE — y’all plan to stick around, hear?}

Halley’s Comet is sometimes called “the comet of all lifetimes,” or “mankind’s comet,” because the length of its orbit brings it within sight of the earth about every seventy-five years — the approximate length of one human lifetime. Most people who live to adulthood have the opportunity to view it.
April 29, Wednesday: Leland Jensen of the Bahá’ís Under the Provisions of the Covenant had been predicting that Halley’s Comet was going to be pulled into Earth’s orbit, with chunks of the comet pelting the Earth for a year. The gravitational force of the comet would be causing great earthquakes and on this day the main body of the comet was scheduled to collide with the planet Earth. Soon Jensen would be proclaiming that “A spiritual stone hit the earth.” (Robbins, Thomas et al. MILLENNIUM, MESSIAHS AND MAYHEM. NY: Routledge, 1997, page 73, 78)
Halley’s Comet

July 28: Halley’s Comet will whip around the sun.
March 27: Halley’s Comet will whip around the sun.

“It’s all now you see. Yesterday won’t be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand years ago.”

- Remark by character “Garin Stevens” in William Faulkner’s Intruder in the Dust

Prepared: March 26, 2016
This stuff presumably looks to you as if it were generated by a human. Such is not the case. Instead, someone has requested that we pull it out of the hat of a pirate who has grown out of the shoulder of our pet parrot “Laura” (as above). What these chronological lists are: they are research reports compiled by ARRGH algorithms out of a database of modules which we term the Kouroo Contexture (this is data mining). To respond to such a request for information we merely push a button.
Commonly, the first output of the algorithm has obvious deficiencies and we need to go back into the modules stored in the contexture and do a minor amount of tweaking, and then we need to punch that button again and recompile the chronology—but there is nothing here that remotely resembles the ordinary “writerly” process you know and love. As the contents of this originating contexture improve, and as the programming improves, and as funding becomes available (to date no funding whatever has been needed in the creation of this facility, the entire operation being run out of pocket change) we expect a diminished need to do such tweaking and recompiling, and we fully expect to achieve a simulation of a generous and untiring robotic research librarian. Onward and upward in this brave new world.

First come first serve. There is no charge.
Place requests with <Kouroo@kouroo.info>. Arrgh.