

## In the Days of the Comet

H.G.Wells

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It is billed as a science-fiction, but this is misleading. There is fiction of course, but no science, and if so preciously little. It is more in the nature of a daydream. Just imagine that there would a sudden change of mind and attitude among people. That they suddenly would become kind and rational and do away with all the stupid and malignant structures that rule the world. Wells was a staunch socialist and was clearly wondering what it would take to make the world at large to take notice and see the light. Yes what would it take? Wells suggests the collision with a comet with no solid mass but only consisting of refined gases which would overwhelm the atmosphere of the earth and replace it with a more benign one which would radically change the thought processes. How this would work in detail the author wisely declines to speculate about, but then it cannot claim to be science-fiction.

So there is a Change and after a few hours of lost consciousness the world wakes up to a new world with new thoughts and motivations. The narrator, abandoned by his childhood sweetheart for a rich rival, had been out for revenge fueled by a bottomless jealousy, and had bought and practiced shooting with a revolver set to kill both his former woman and her new partner as well as himself. He had managed to track them down and in the process of shooting at them the Comet finally hits the earth. The comet which initially had only been a small speck on the sky only visible through a telescope had become a huge brilliant presence, outshining the full-moon casting a second shadow and making nocturnal street-lite superfluous.

Although Wells spends some time to sketch the momentous changes in society, creating a veritable utopia. Most of the old buildings are destroyed, books are burned, cities and factories dismantled, poverty abolished. How this would work out in practice is of course not touched upon. What engages the author the most is the resolution of the love triangle after the Change. His girlfriend suggests a *menage a trois*, as she is loath to give up her old boyfriend, but both he and his rival are dead set against it, and their ways are to part for ever. Instead he focuses his emotional attachment on his fading mother and as she dies he gets involved in the nurse who had taken care of her, a woman who initially had been invisible to him due to her plainness. Yet, the author gets second thoughts, and in the end there will be a *menage a quatre*, something that scandalized his contemporaries, especially the Webbs, the leaders of the Fabian Society, through which much of his political action was funneled..

There are obvious pointers to the background of the author. The narrator's mother works in a basement of her tenement and she is old-fashionably religious; the father of his girlfriend works as a gardener at an estate, just as Wells' own father had been. And of course the life of the narrator as an autodidact and socialist is not too far from the experience of Wells himself as a young man. And naturally what concerned Wells at the most personal level was his problem with love and the prevalent monogamous strictures

of the time. However the excessive due it gets makes the book rather dated not to say irrelevant.

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