

**NOVEMBER 2024 MONTHLY BLOG/ 167  
HICKORY DICKORY DOCK!**



**Hickory Dickory Dock/  
The Mouse Ran Up the Clock  
@<https://www.indiaparenting.com/hickory-dickory-dock.html> (2024)**

While last month's Conference in Norwich was evoked by the genially-smiling 'Man in the Moon', this month another meeting in Antwerp set me chanting 'Hickory Dickory Dock'. The words are absurdly simple. The mouse ran up the clock! The clock struck the hour! And then the mouse ran down again!

But this basic rhyme records the perennial human fascination with telling the Time; and it illustrates, specifically, how adults sought to familiarise young children with the steady rhythms of a ticking clock. (The earliest recorded version of this rhyme dates from 1744, in a great era of British clock-building).<sup>1</sup>

And amusingly, today's globally popular social media platform for sharing short videos (invented in China in 2016) is named ... Tik Tok.<sup>2</sup>

Getting to grips with Time is the underlying theme of the Antwerp Conference to which I will be contributing. Specifically, it focuses upon the history of forecasting the future. Here there is endless scope.<sup>3</sup> Optimists see unfolding glories. Pessimists, by contrast, forecast the inevitability of total gloom and doom. (It's not so exciting to prophesy simply '*More of the same*').

However, while full details of the future remain unknown, the scope is constantly being restricted by serious scientific calculations. Thus the expected lifespan of our local Sun (the focal source of all life on Planet Earth) is now put at some 5 billion years. Then it will run out of hydrogen, and turn into a ‘red giant’, getting steadily larger and cooler.<sup>4</sup>

Alternatively, when will the Milky Way (in which our solar system is located) collide with the Andromeda Galaxy, within the regular processes of slow cosmic transformation? No need to wait so long for some highly spectacular local excitement. This predicted collision will occur in approximately 4.5 billion years from now. Stars will be thrown into new and unpredictable orbits.<sup>5</sup> Any humans still around to experience this cosmic collision will have to hold onto every seat-belt in sight.

Of course, soothsayers and prophets are not required to accept these cool, scientific calculations, either in whole or in part. They are free to predict the end of the world anytime - sooner or later. They often build their cases upon their readings of scriptural texts.<sup>6</sup> And Doomsday cults not infrequently spring up around those prophets who thunder out their apocalyptic warnings with emphatic relish.<sup>7</sup>

The terrain for future predictions is, however, getting crowded. Secular reports of scientific explorations of Near and Deep Space now jostle with more rapturous and/or more terrifying formulations. And, while many of these predictions are projected safely far into the future, some are more immediate. Scientists today, for example, calculate that the regularly orbiting Halley’s Comet will return into view from Planet Earth in late spring/early summer 2061.<sup>8</sup> Let all those of us, who currently can, wait and (literally) see ...

Plenty of big themes therefore to keep the Prophecies Conference busy in Antwerp in mid-November 2024. It’s not hard to predict a lively and intellectually stimulating event. And, since the due-date is sufficiently near, the

participants will be able to confirm Yes/No by late November. The clock is ticking, though currently I see no mouse in attendance ...

## ENDNOTES:

- 
- <sup>1</sup> I. and P. Opie (eds), *The Oxford Book of Nursery Rhymes* (1997 edn.), pp. 185-6. See also for context, J. McKenna, *Watch, Clock and Dial-Makers of Birmingham, 1547-1900* (1988); and Anon., *A Complete History of English Clock and Watch Makers* (2011).
  - <sup>2</sup> For a full and not uncritical account see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TikTok> (viewed 20 Oct. 2024).
  - <sup>3</sup> For approaches to studying Time, see PJC, *Time and the Shape of History* (2007); and PJC, *Time-Space: We Are All in It Together* (forthcoming 2024/2025).
  - <sup>4</sup> See P. McHurrin in <https://askanearthspacescientist.asu.edu/top-question/sun-dying> (viewed 20 Oct. 2024).
  - <sup>5</sup> Consult [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andromeda%E2%80%93Milky\\_Way\\_collision](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andromeda%E2%80%93Milky_Way_collision) (viewed 20 Oct. 2024).
  - <sup>6</sup> See many examples in R. Abanes, *End Time Visions* (1998); and E. Weber, *Apocalypses* (1999).
  - <sup>7</sup> R.L. Snow, *Deadly Cults: The Crimes of True Believers* (2003).
  - <sup>8</sup> P. Lancaster-Brown, *Halley and his Comet* (1985); P. Moore and J. Mason, *The Return of Halley's Comet* (1984); and, contextually, A.A. Siddiqi, *Beyond Earth: A Chronicle of Deep Space Exploration* (2018).