

# Romance of the Year

## Time Civil, Ecclesiastical and Astronomical—Date of New Year Variable—Equinoxes Alone Constant—Customs of New Year's Observance in Ancient and Modern Times.

At this time we celebrate the birth of the New Year and erect another milestone on the road of Time. How few think that 153 years ago the year of this season was old. How came the change? Not by the revolution of the earth, for that is practically unchangeable, but through the intervention of human enactment. Though time, as measured by the motions of the earth, may be taken as constant, yet its divisions into seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years, and their beginnings and endings, are arbitrary products of the human mind, and therefore variable.

All nations and people have a particular epoch from which they date the era in which they may have lived. The Romans dated their chronological events from the founding of the city. The expression, "The year of Rome," or the letters A. U. C. (ab urbs condita) refers to that particular epoch. The Mohammedans express their sequence of time by "the year of the prophet." The date is from the Hijra, or the flight of Mohammed from Mecca (Hajira is pronounced Hej-ira, and is an Arabic word meaning flight), which occurred A. D. 622. The Jews reckon their dispensation from the creation of the world, but in reality their chronology begins with the Exodus. Moses intentionally introduced a new calendar, and makes Abib their first month. It has been supposed that the Jewish Sabbath is the same as the seventh day on which God ended His work, but as Moses changed the first month to Abib, he changed the first day also. The first day of this new year was the first day of the first month and the first day of the first week. The Sabbath being held on the seventh day, it must of necessity have been changed also. Not being changed, it could not be in correspondence with the seventh day of creation on which God "rested." Christians date their epoch from the birth of Christ, the expression for which in the Latin words Anno Domini, or A. D., the initial letters of the words. Five centuries elapsed before an attempt was made to authoritatively fix the date of the Nativity. This was then undertaken by Dionysius Exiguus (little), who fixed our present chronology. It is now generally allowed that he was four years out in his reckoning, and that B. C. 4 is the correct year. This corresponds with the statement by Irenaeus and Tertullian that Christ was born about the year of Rome 751.

Different nations have begun their count of time at different parts of the twenty-four hours. The ancient Assyrians, Babylonians, Syrians, Persians, the modern Greeks and the inhabitants of the Balearic Isles reckon their day from sunrise to sunrise. Why the ancient nations began the day at sunrise is evident from their early religion, which was Magism. Fire was a chief object of reverence with them, and the sun as the grand symbol of their worship received especial veneration. Hence they began their day as they began their devotions—with the rising sun.

Others, like the Athenians, the Chinese and the Jews have counted the day from sunset to sunset. Why the Jews begin the day from sunset is evident from their religion. The characteristics of the Jewish religion are in sharp contrast to those of other nations. The aim of Moses was to sever them from the grossness of oriental religions. Hence the contrasts and antitheses. If the worshippers of the elements begin the day with sunrise, then the followers of Jehovah will begin theirs with sunset. Moses has no concord with error.

The Egyptians and pagan Roman priests began their day at midnight. Most European nations follow the same rule. Americans have also adopted the custom. Astronomers, however, begin the day at noon, when the sun is on the meridian.

The day, meaning thereby light, from sunrise to sunset, was in ancient times divided into twelve equal parts, called hours. A similar division was observed with the night. Thus it will be seen the hour was constantly changing in its duration. The hour of the day is winter, when the days were short, was much longer than in summer, and vice versa. The same, of course, was the case with the nights, also. So that only at the equinoxes were the two series of hours equal. This was most inconvenient and resulted in much confusion.

To Hipparchus, a Greek philosopher, who flourished about B. C. 150, must be given the credit of dividing the day from midnight to midnight into twenty-four hours, or two equal periods of twelve hours each. This system prevails generally at the present time, and is the only one that continues to be used.

Sun, Mercury, Venus, Moon, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn. We call three days of the week directly after the planets—Saturday (Saturn), Sunday (Sun), Monday (Moon), and four through the Saxon names for the others: Tuesday (Tuesco—Mars), Wednesday (Woden—Mercury), Thursday (Thor—Jupiter), and Friday (Friga—Venus).

The month, no doubt, originated from the phases of the moon. These, sharp and well-defined, are four in number: the new moon, first quarter, full moon and last quarter. Each of these phases occupies about seven days, so that from new full moon to new full moon, there is something more than twenty-nine days, which is called a synodical month, or lunation.

No nation up to the present time has devised a system of absolute accuracy in the measurement of the solar year. Some ancient nations, such as the Chaldeans, reckoned the year as 360 days. This is the principle of that most ancient astronomical term, the Zodiac. The Zodiac is a belt encircling the heavens on each side of the ecliptic, within which the planets known to the ancients always revolve. It extends eight degrees on each side of the ecliptic. It is divided into twelve equal parts, called signs of the Zodiac. It is a great cycle, and is divided into 360 degrees, like all circles; hence 360 days in the Chaldean year.

The Egyptians counted 365 days in their year. As the year contains 365 1/4 days nearly, such systems could not fall to work great inconvenience, for the seasons would move round in a cycle from one time of the year to the other. Let me make this quite plain. Take the winter solstice, for instance, which happens on Dec. 21. At the end of four years the solstice would be not on Dec. 21, but on Dec. 22. The sun would be behind time. In order, therefore, that the seasons should occur at the same time in the civil year, it was necessary to take account of this fraction of a day.

Julius Caesar, the great Roman emperor, determined to rectify the error. He called the celebrated Egyptian astronomer, Sosigenes, to his aid. Sosigenes suggested the addition of a day every fourth year. This day was added to February, and is known to us as "Leap Year," but to the Romans as Bissextile (Bis, twice, sextus, sixth).

This corrected calendar became known as the Julian. But as it made the year consist of 365 days, 6 hours. It was in excess of the actual time by 1 minute 10.3 seconds. Small as was this fraction, it accumulated to about one day in every 134 years.

The calendar needed reform. Time, civil and ecclesiastical, required adjustment. But to urge the necessary change was dangerous, as the learned Friar Bacon found to his cost. For pointing out errors in the calendar he received as a reward for the advocacy of the truth a prison, where he remained ten years.

As often happens, ecclesiastical requirements minister to civil necessities. The immediate cause of the correction of the calendar was an error in the time of observing the Easter festival. The Council of Nice, in A. D. 325, decreed that Easter is the Sunday following the full moon, next after the Vernal equinox. Owing to disputes arising from this decree Pope Hilarius, in 463, ordered that the paschal moon should not be the actual full moon, but an ideal one, falling on the 14th day of the moon by the metonic cycle (so-called from Meton, a Greek philosopher, who discovered it. It consists of nineteen years, at the end of which the sun is in about the same position he was at the beginning).

In 1582 it was found that the real equinox fell ten days before the nominal one, and from the error in the Metonic cycle, Easter had got four days wrong. Then Pope Gregory XIII reformed the calendar, called after him the Gregorian calendar, by the aid of Clavius, a learned Jesuit. The equinox of 1582, which should have fallen on March 21, fell on March 11. Gregory cut the Gordian knot by decreeing that Oct. 5 of that year should be counted as Oct. 15.

To the question, What is time? We may give the answer, duration, as measured by the solar system. For everyday purposes and artificial divisions mechanical contrivances are necessary.

It was a pillar erected near a flight of steps (translated degrees in the English Bible). Berosus was the first to construct a sundial proper, in B. C. 540—the first recorded in profane history.

But sundials are only useful when the sun shines; hence some other measures of time became a necessity. The Egyptians were successful in inventing such a contrivance. They called it the Clepsydra (klops, to steal, and hudor, water), by which time was measured by a continuous flow of water at a uniform motion. The Clepsydra is first mentioned by Empedocles, who flourished in the fifth century before Christ. It was brought to a high degree of perfection by a philosopher of Alexandria, named Ctesibius, and continued down to the invention of clocks, probably in the fourteenth century. Watches followed in due course, till they have become an almost necessary requisite of everyday use.

Most people are under the impression that the rotation of the earth has never varied from one complete turn in twenty-four hours. But this is an error. The motions of both earth and moon have not been invariable. There was a time when the lunar month was twenty-nine days instead of twenty-seven, as it now is (Sir R. Ball: Time and Tide). The synodical month, therefore, was between thirty and thirty-one days. (A synodical month is the interval from one new moon to the next.) So that primitive man, reckoning the month as a synodical period, or lunation, may not have been so inaccurate as we in our superior wisdom imagine.

Going back to this epoch to the infancy of the moon, we come to a time when the day and month were of equal duration—about four hours each! Going forward to the old age of the earth, we come to an epoch when the day and month are again equal. But this time, instead of being four hours each, they will be 1,400 hours. Just think of it! One day lasting 1,400 hours! When the day will equal fifty-eight of our present days, what will be the length of the year? But we must not stop at a 1,400-hour day. Going still forward in the far-off future, we come to a time when the face of the earth will be always turned to the sun, as the moon's face is now turned to the earth, and as she will continue to be. Then there will be a perpetual day, for the sun shall never set, literally fulfilling the words of the prophet: "Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself." (Is. lx: 20.) The romance of time! How it fascinates!

The new year has been observed with festive rejoicings from remotest antiquity. Its celebration by religious, as well as secular observances, prevailed generally among the nations of antiquity. And Egyptians, Hindus, Chinese, Persians, Jews, Romans and Mohammedans, although differing widely as to the time from which they reckon the new year, all regard it with especial interest of a joyous kind.

In olden Roman times the new year, which began in March, was inaugurated by a festive procession, with the priests of Mars carrying the sacred shield before the people. The people wished each other good health and prosperity and exchanged presents.

The Chinese begin the year at the Vernal equinox, and make it one of the most splendid festivals. All classes mingle together, and unite in thanksgiving for mercies received and prayers for a genial season and good crop.

With the Hindus the first day of the new year is sacred to Ganesa, the god of wisdom, to whom kids and wild deer are sacrificed amid illuminations and rejoicings. Among the mountainous tribes a buffalo is sacrificed before vast multitudes of people.

In ancient Persia prisoners were liberated and offenders pardoned. The Persian new year much resembled the Sabbathical year of the Jews.

The Sabians held a grand festival on the day the sun entered Aries, one of the signs of the Zodiac. Priests and people marched to the temples and sacrificed to the planetary gods.

In the British Isles the Druids began the year on March 10th, with the solemn ceremony of cutting the mistletoe from the sacred oak. On that day two white bulls were tied by the horns. When a Druid, clothed in white robes, mounted the tree and cut off the mistletoe, after which the sacrifices were offered.

The Mexicans on new year's day adorned their houses and temples and engaged in various religious ceremonies. On such occasion human sacrifice was offered to propitiate the gods.

In modern times it is also an occasion of social rejoicing and interchange of courtesies. In England, under old style, the year began on March 25. On the change of date to Jan. 1, great opposition was offered by the people generally. Many really believed they were being deprived of eleven years of their existence.

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