

Hidden Treasure-Historical Truth

January 1st, A New Beginning

By Katherine Bone

Confetti, champagne, dancing, a kiss at the stroke of midnight, "Auld Lang Syne", plans and resolutions, countless to-do lists, and celebrations ending only when the first beckoning rays of January 1st dawn. As each lasting moment of the old year ticks away...5...4...3...2...1, and the minute hand lands on the midnight mark, mortal men look back to the past, one last time, then set determined eyes forward with a blossoming hope that prosperity and better days are yet to come.

"Auld Lang Syne", written by the Scottish poet, Robert Burns, calls for us to appreciate relationships of the past and to remember, by looking back. Not surprisingly, in the land of Robert Burns, First-footer, a dark-haired man and harbinger of good luck, is waited upon with great expectation. And should a First-footer cross a Scottish threshold upon the midnight bells, good omens bless all within. *Hogmanay*, first-footing, is a celebration led by friends and relatives gathering together to sing "Auld Lang Syne", meaning 'old long since', 'old long ago', 'the good old days', or 'days gone by'. By casting off the old and with First-footer's blessing, the Scots look to the New Year with great excitement.

Anticipation, resolution, looking backward and ahead, these are things that fill mortal minds as the clock chimes twelve times on December 31st. It is also the reason why the first month of the year is named January.

It is fitting that January is the first month of the Gregorian calendar. January is named after the Roman god, Janus, one of the original gods of the Numina, meaning Powers or Wills. A god of beginnings, gates, doors (*ianua*) and doorways, Janus was worshiped at first harvest, planting, marriage, birth, and any beginnings important to a person's life. Janus represented the contrary, life and civilization, country and city, peace and war, and the maturing of mankind.

One tradition states that Janus originally hailed from Thessaly. Welcomed into Latium by Queen Camese, he became her king and ruled by her side. Together they had several children, one being the river god Tiberinus, of which the Tiber River is named. Harboring Saturn when he fled Jupiter, as Latium's first king, Janus brought peace and the Golden Age to his kingdom. Prosperity filled his nation as money, cultivation, and law were introduced. Because he was such a successful and well-loved king, after his death, he was deified and became the official protector of Rome. When Romulus kidnapped the Sabine women and the Sabines attacked, he caused a hot spring to erupt from the ground, consequently forcing the attacking Sabine to retreat. Ever since that time, statues of Janus, represented by two bearded faces looking in opposite directions and symbolically holding a key in his right hand, were found in temples on the Forum Romanum through which Roman warriors went to war, the Forum Olitorium, and the Forum of Nerva, built in the 1st Century. His temples ran east and west, where dawn and dusk begin and end. Two doors flanked his statue and, in keeping with his image, the doors to his temple were closed when Rome was at peace. Surprisingly, peace occurred only three times in the first 700 years of Rome's existence. First, during the reign of good king Numa, second, after the first Punic War, when Carthage was defeated in 241 B.C., and lastly, during Augustus' reign, when Milton wrote,

No war or battle's sound
Was heard the world around.

At midnight, on December 31st, Romans, to this day, participate in an ancient tradition where branches from sacred trees are exchanged symbolizing good fortune. Likewise, on New Year's Day, nuts or coins with Janus' profile imprinted on them are exchanged.

The oldest of holidays, New Year's Day was first celebrated in ancient Babylon about 4,000 years ago. Though they had no written calendar, Babylonians celebrated the New Year on what is now March 23 in or about the year 2,000 B.C. and the event lasted eleven days. Ancient Greeks celebrated the New Year on December 21st or 22nd. Romans began their calendar year on March 1 until the Julian calendar was set aside and the Gregorian calendar, named after Pope Gregory XIII, became the standard for marking time around 1582. Christian countries once made December 25th, the first day of the year. The Russian Orthodox Church celebrated the New Year on January 14th. And a French King made Easter the first of the year until that date was moved to September 22. The Jewish New Year begins on Tishri 1, between September 5th and October 5th. Iran marks the New Year on March 21, calling that day *No Ruz*, meaning "New Day." China celebrates the old Chinese New Year between January 21st and February 19th. But no matter how or when we celebrate the New Year, it is marked by great awe and celebration as Father Time is reborn in the pages of a particular adopted calendar.

Tishri, Heshvan, Kislev, Tebet, Shebat, Adar, Nisan, Iyar, Sivan, Tammuz, Ab, and Elul, are the months of a Hebrew Calendar. Muharram, Safar, Rabi I, Rabi II, Jumada I, Jumada II, Rajab, Shaban, Ramadan, Shawwal, Zulkadah, and Zuhijjah, are the months in an Islamic Calendar. In China, the Gregorian and lunar-solar calendar begins with the Rat, Ox, Tiger, Hare, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Sheep, Monkey, Rooster, Dog, and Pig (Boar).

No matter how you say Happy New Year or what calendar you use, the date is meaningful to everyone in the world. Here are other ways to say Happy New Year.

Chinese: Chu Shen Tan

Dutch: Gullukkig Niuw Jaar

French: Bonne Annee

German: Prosit Neujahr

Greek: Eftecheezmaenos o Kaenooryos hronos

Hebrew: L'Shannah Tovah Tikatevu

Irish (Gaelic): Bliain nua fe mhaise dhuit

Italian: Buon Capodanno

Polish: Szczesliwego Nowego Roku

Portuguese: Feliz Ano Novo

Russian: S Novim Godom

Spanish: Feliz Ano Nuevo or Prospero Ano Nuevo

As January has been accepted as the first month in our calendar, in England, long ago, the first month of the year was called *Wulf-monath*, or Wolf month, because that was the time hungry wolves scavenged villages for food. Was the story of Wulf-monath inspiration for The Brothers Grimm's Little Red Riding Hood?

January 1st is, also, the birthdate of some very famous authors.

1951 Frans Kellendonk, author, *Ruin, The Good for Nothing*

1928 Ernest R. Tidyman, Ohio, novelist/screenwriter, *French Connection*
1919 J.D. Salinger, American Novelist, *Catcher in the Rye*
1910 Russ Bender, actor and writer, *Amazing Colossal Man, Space Monster*
1880 Shalom Asch, Poland, Yiddish writer, *Motke Ganev*
1879 Edward M. Forster, England, novelist, *Howards End, Passage to India*
1873 Mariano Azuela, Mexico, novelist, *The Flies, The Bosses*
1863 Aleko Konstantinov, Bulgarian writer, *To Chicago and Back*
1819 Author Hugh Clough, poet, friend of Matthew Arnold
1792 Henrik A. Bjerregaard, Norwegian writer/poet, *Sonner af Norge*
1764 John Kinker, Dutch linguist/philosopher/poet, *Minderjarige Zangster*
1729 Edmund Burke, British author, *Philosophy and Inquiry*
1714 Kristijonas Donelaitis, Lutheran pastor, Lithuanian poet, *The Seas*

As the New Year begins and dreams of success and aspirations rise remember without birth there can be no life. Without failure success cannot be found. January 1st allows each of us to begin anew. Look into the morning dawn of New Year's Day with great expectation. Dream big! Let Janus' example be your guide. January gives you the right to create the life you want to live and now is the time to make that life your own.