



PUBLISHED AT

58 BAY ST., - - - - - TORONTO, CANADA.

VOL. III.

JANUARY, 1891.

NO. I.

TERMS.

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PUBLISHERS OF THE CANADIAN QUEEN,

58 BAY STREET, TORONTO, CANADA.

NEW YEAR'S DAY.



HE first of January has not always been the first day of the year. In history, the 25th December, 1st March, and 15th March, have all been in use as the initial day.

It was not till A.D. 1752, that the computation was changed in England and her Colonies from the Julian or old style calendar to the new or Gregorian style, by which we now compute dates. The new style had, however, been generally adopted in Roman Catholic countries two centuries previously.

All ancient nations appear to have kept the advent of the new year hilariously, although differing in the dates on which it was celebrated. The Egyptians, Jews, Chinese and Mahomedans have made it a festal day. Douglas Sladen, the Australian writer, who returned from Japan recently, describes in a Canadian paper, the quaint New Year customs kept up by the Japs for a whole week with music and masquerades. Among the Romans, the day was celebrated with great license, and hence, the early fathers of the Church, urged, that as a contrast to pagan excesses, Christians should set it apart as a day of humiliation and prayer, but the exhortation was only partially carried out.

The sentiments awakened by the close of a definite period substracted from our lives, and yet bringing forward another, that hope ever whispers may be happier and more prosperous than the last, are of a mixed complexion. Satisfaction is felt that matters have gone so well up to date, and a feeling of gladness seems natural that they may become better in the

future. Hence the anniversary of the coming era has always been more of a popular festival and less of a religious observance than Christmas is. The innate joyousness of beginning a new period, of turning over a new leaf, with its re-awakening hopes and expectations, appropriately marked by friendly gatherings and genial customs, is not easy to be repressed. It is true the Roman Catholic Church holds it as a religious day, yet its gayer aspect is not wanting in popular estimation. Among the Druids, it was celebrated by special sacrifices, followed by popular sports. From what we have on record of Saxon times, the coming year was marked by general rejoicing and rude festivity. Later in British history by appropriate merrymakings and the giving of gifts among friends. England has retained the remembrance in the modern custom of exchanging congratulatory cards. Scotland has always devoted the initial day of the year to jollity. Although all ancient customs and traditions are dying out before the march of progress, the genial Scotch still keep up the hospitalities of New Year, if with somewhat diminished lustre. Formerly friendly parties sat up all night of 31st December "to see the old year out and the new year in." A singular Scotch superstition still holds its place as to "the first foot," or first person who comes to the house or is met on New Year's morning. According to the quality of the first foot, good "luck" or bad will prevail to the individual or the household throughout the year. The Irish used to have a custom, the origin of which may be traced to pagan times, to practice a kind of divination by a cake on New Year's,—St. Sylvester's,—eve. Neighbors "gentle and simple" assembled under some hospitable roof, where a flat cake of oatmeal was compounded with due ceremony and cooked on a "griddle" sheet of iron over the turf fire. This being done the cake was solemnly placed in the hands of the young man whose coming birthday was nearest to the age of twenty-one, and whose business it was to dash the cake violently against the wall, whence, of course, the fragments scattered on the floor. A prayer for prosperity was then repeated, but scarcely was the "amen" uttered, when the whole company precipitated themselves on the floor and scrambled for the fragments. Happy was the maiden who secured the first bit, for it was a sure sign that she would have a house of her own within the year. Germany and other nations of Teutonic origin, do not neglect the anniversary, nor do those of Celtic and of Latin extraction. France has a prolonged festal time, lasting a week or more, during which genialities and gaieties of all kinds abound. New Year levees are held at all the European Courts.

Poetry in all languages has celebrated the anniversary. Who does not remember Coleridge's magnificent "Ode to the Departing Year?"

Spirit who sweepst the wild harp of Time!
It is most hard, with an untroubled ear
Thy dark invoken harmonies to hear!
Yet, mine eye fixed on Heaven's unchanging clime,
Long had I listened, free from mortal fear,
With inward stillness and a bowed mind;
When lo! its folds far waving in the wind,
I saw the train of the departing Year! * * *

Our poets of the Dominion have not so often hymned the natal day of the year, as they have Christmas Day, yet they have not quite neglected it. Many a bereaved heart will feel the chords of sympathy stricken by this sad address to another past year, not 1890, by George Martin, who stands so deservedly among the first in the list of Canadian bards:

Year of all years, that hath been unto me
More bitter than the depths of Acheron,
I will not curse thee for the ill thou'st done,
But bow as best I may to thy decree.