



THE NEW YEAR.

Ring on ye bells, ye New Year bells,
Ring out your merry tuneful notes,
Like grateful song your music swells
As on the midnight air it floats.

Ring out your greetings far and near.
In gladsome tones ye seem to say—
Give thanks and praise, another year
With blessings crowned, has passed away.

The bitter wail of dire distress
Has not been heard throughout our land;
From shore to shore reigns quietness,
Saviours divine on every hand.

No foes, no fears, no pestilence,
No smiting sword, no famine blight,
But peace and plenty heaven has sent
To bless our homes by day and night.

Then let the New Year's greetings pass
From lip to lip with kindly cheer,
For o'er us like a mantle cast
Rests God's protecting love and care.

Let each and all with heart and voice
Join with the merry New Year's bell,
To bless high heaven and rejoice
That with our country all is well.

WHAT IS A YEAR?

A YEAR may be defined as the time required for one complete revolution of the earth round the sun; or the period in which the cycle of the seasons is fully completed. The mean length of the solar or tropical year is 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes and 49 seconds. But for convenience in reckoning, it has been found necessary to make the year terminate with a day instead of a fraction of one, lumping the fractions together so as to make up a day among themselves. About forty-five years before Christ, Julius Cæsar, having, by the help of Sosigenes, an Alexandrian philosopher, come to a tolerably clear understanding of the length of the year, decreed that every fourth year should be held to consist of 366 days, for the purpose of absorbing the odd hours. But seeing that, in reality, a day every fourth year is too much by 11 minutes, 10 seconds, and three-tenths of a second, it inevitably followed that the beginning of the year moved onward ahead of the point at which it was in the days of Cæsar; in other words, the natural time fell behind the reckoning. From the time of the Council of Nice, in 325, when the vernal equinox fell correctly on the 21st of March, Pope Gregory found in 1582 that there had been an over-reckoning to the extent of ten days and now the vernal equinox fell on the 11th of March. To correct the past error, he decreed that the 5th of October that year should be reckoned as the 15th, and, to keep the year right in future, the overplus being 18 hours, 37 minutes and 10 seconds in a century, he ordered that every centennial year that could not be divided by 4 (1700, 1800, 1900, 2100, 2200, &c.) should *not* be bissextile, as it otherwise would be; thus, in short, dropping the extra day three times every four hundred years. The Gregorian style, as it was called, readily obtained sway in Catholic, but not in Protestant countries. It was not adopted in Britain till the year 1752, by which time the discrepancy between the Julian and Gregorian periods amounted to *eleven* days, when an Act of Parliament was passed, dictating that the 3rd of September that year should be reckoned the 14th. Russia retains the old style of reckoning. Prior to the same date, the British year began on the 25th of March, and the same usage prevailed in this country.