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The Months On Parade

By Dorothy Elerath

New Year's eve was celebrated by those who were not snow-bound with the usual horn-blowing, bell-ringing, the singing of Auld Lang Syne, a song of praise of friendship and "old time's sake" between friends, and general jollity.

According to our Christian calendar, another year has rolled around. Our present day calendar, instituted in 1582, is called the Gregorian calendar after Pope Gregory XIII, its originator. It is an adaptation of the Roman Julian calendar allowing 365 days to the year with the provision made for "leap year."

Though our present day calendar is measured from the birth of Christ, the names of the months still retain the mythical Roman god and goddess names given in the time of Julius Caesar.

January

The first month, January, is named for the old Roman god Janus. Janus was a strange figure, a god with two faces, one looking forward, the other looking back. He was the god of Beginnings and Ends. The pious Roman who wanted to begin a matter well, or to make a good end of something, implored the assistance of Janus. It was a clever idea of the Romans to name the first month of the year after Janus, because he suggests looking forward and looking back, and everyone feels that the beginning of a year is a time to do just that.

February

At one time February was the last month of the year, but 450 years before Christ it was placed after January instead of before, and thus it became the second month. Later on March was reckoned as the beginning of the year, and so once again February became the last month. Now it has settled down to its second place, but every four years February has one day added to it and so it remains the most restless and unsettled month in the calendar.

The name February comes from a Roman festival of purification named Februa in honor of the god Lupercus, and suggests cleansing and purifying. Even today it is toward the end of February that housewives get the urge to start "spring cleaning."

March And April

Mars, the god of war, has the third month named in his honor. The figure of Mars, brandishing a long spear and clattering across the horizon in a chariot drawn by two horses named, incidentally, Terror and Flight, is still familiar to us. To the Romans, Mars was more than a fighter; he was regarded as a god who could do almost anything because he was so strong. Mars was associated with thunder and lightning. March is, we must admit, a noisy and blustery month.

April is different. It is not named for a god or goddess, but is the angel of spring. Gracious, exquisite, tender and kind, April follows behind Mars' bloodstained chariot washing the earth with soft showers and calling up the grass and flowers to cover the ruts and gashes left by Mars. April is "The Opener." The Romans saw that this month opened the gates of birth and restored to life all the gentle things which had hidden in terror from the blasts of winter. "Omnia aperit!" they exclaimed in admiration; which means, "It opens all things," thus April—"The Opener."

May And June

Behind April comes the goddess Maia. Her father was named Atlas, and it was supposed that the weight of the world rested on his shoulders. He had seven daughters who lived in a mountain, and Maia was the most famous of these seven because of her son Mercury who ran swiftly from heaven to earth on errands. Jupiter, the father of all the gods, took Maia and her sisters and placed them near together as stars in the sky. The cluster of six stars called the Pleiades is supposed to be Maia and her sisters. The seventh star of the cluster is invisible. It represents one of the sisters who married a man named Sisyphus and because he was condemned to roll a stone up a hill eternally, she has hidden her face in sorrow.

Some claim June is named for the goddess Juno, the beautiful but jealous wife of Jupiter, who drove about in a chariot drawn by strutting peacocks; and others say June is named for Junius, a proud and haughty man of a great Roman family.

July And August

Julius Caesar, soldier, emperor, conqueror, who not only made wise laws and wrote immortal books, but also set himself to reform the calendar, gives his name to the seventh month. Before his time this month was called Quintilis, which means the

fifth month. When the year began in March, this month was fifth on the Calendar. He himself made the fifth month the seventh, and because the old name of Quintilis would not suit, and because he himself was born in this month, he said that the seventh month in the year should be named July.

August is named for Julius Caesar's grandnephew Octavius or Augustus Caesar who ruled the Roman empire with Mark Antony and Lepidus. The people, anxious to flatter him, changed his name to Augustus meaning noble, then they called the eighth month August. But July had 31 days, and August only 30, so to avoid jealousy and to be fair, they took a day from February and tacked it on to the end of August. It is easy to remember July and August have 31 days each by thinking of the two great Roman emperors. The reign of Augustus Caesar was called the Golden Age, because he brought peace to the war-tired people and under his patronage literature and art flourished. Horace and Virgil, the immortal poets, lived during this age. It was in the reign of this mighty Roman emperor that far away in Syria the Holy Child was born, whose birth has divided time

and whose reign has not yet ended.

Last Four Months

As Augustus was so great, no one dared name a month following his month after any god, goddess, or emperor, so September, October, November and December, merely mean the numbers 7, 8, 9 and 10. When the year began in March, this was their true sequence, but now they merely serve as a reminder of the distant past.

Many unsuccessful attempts have been made to improve upon the Gregorian system, a plan having of late been placed before the world under the auspices of the League of Nations. By this plan the months would be equal in length.

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