

THE ROMAN CALENDAR

How many people, when they glance at the calendar on their desk to find out the day of the month, give even a thought to the origin of the calendar? Yet it is interesting to follow the development of the calendar that had the greatest influence on our present-day system of dividing time into years, months, weeks, and days for use in civil life.

The old Roman method is of most interest to us because it is from the Romans that we got the names of our months. The civil calendar of all European countries has been borrowed from that of the Romans. The first used by the Romans contained ten months only, including in all three hundred and four days. The ancient Roman year commenced with March. The last four months September, October, November, and December still remain. September (from *septem*, seven) was originally the seventh month of the year. In the reign of Numa two months were added, January at the beginning and February at the end. In the year four hundred and fifty-two B.C. Decemvirs changed the order of the months and placed February after January.

In the year forty-six B.C. Julius Caesar, in order to end the disorders caused by the pontiffs, abolished the use of the lunar year and the intercalary month and regulated the unit year entirely by the sun. The first Julian year commenced with the first of January of the forty-sixth year before the birth of Christ and seven hundred and eight years from the foundation of the city.

The Roman months, after the reforms by Julius Caesar, contained the same number of days as our calendar. Their names were: *Ianuarius*, *Februarius*, *Martius*, *Aprilis*, *Maius*, *Iulius*, *Augustus*, *September*, *October*, *November*, and *December*. *Iulius* and *Augustus* were anciently called *Quintilis* and *Sextilis*; their present names were borrowed in compliment to Julius Caesar and Augustus, the reformers of the old calendar.

The Romans employed a division of the month and a method of reckoning days which appears very extraordinary to us. Instead of distinguishing the days by the ordinal numbers first, second, third, etc., the Romans had three fixed points in the month from which all other dates were reckoned.

These fixed dates were called *Kalendae* (the Kalends), *Nonae* (the Nones), and *Idus* (the Ides). The Kalends were the first day of the month and were so denominated because it had been an ancient custom of the pontiffs to call the people together on that day. The Nones, the ninth day before the Ides, counting inclusively, were either the fifth or seventh day of the month. The Ides were at the middle of the month, either the thirteenth or the fifteenth day.

In March, July, October, and May the Nones were on the seventh and the Ides were on the fifteenth. In all the other months the Nones were on the fifth and the Ides were on the thirteenth day. Thus the first of January was called *Kalendae Ianuariae* which was after abbreviated to *Kal. Ian.* The day before any fixed point was expressed by "*pridie*," followed by the accusative. For example, December thirty-first would be *pridie Kalendas Ianuarias*, and March fourteenth would be *pridie Idus Martias*. The other days they reckoned backwards and by inclusive counting from the Kalends, Nones, or Ides, whether in the same or the second of June, according to the Roman reckoning, would be the fourth day before the Nones, or *die quarta ante Nonas Iunias*. The tenth of March was called *die sexta ante Idus Martias*, the sixth day before the Ides of March. Finally, to express any of the days after the Ides, they reckoned in a similar manner from the Kalends of the following month. For example, December thirtieth would be *die tertia ante Kalendas Ianuarias*.

These forms often were shortened by the omission of *die*, or *ante*, or both, and the use of the Roman numeral to indicate the day. Thus *die tertia ante Kalendas Ianuarias* often would be written *III Kal. Ian.*

This calendar continued in use among the Romans until the fall of the empire, and throughout Christendom till the year 1582. In that year Pope Gregory XIII issued a brief abolishing the Julian Calendar in all Catholic countries, and introducing in its stead the one now in use under the name of the Gregorian or reformed calendar.