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## The New Year

by Sue Hitchcock

1752 Britain joins Europe

“At the end of my sermon, I have an important announcement to make. Please wait and listen carefully. It is nothing to fear.”

The Reverend Wilton kept his sermon short for once, giving himself plenty of time to explain the new law, which had been gossiped about, but also misunderstood causing unrest if not panic.

“The reason for the new law is nothing to do with the natural world, simply an error in the way we count our days and months. Our calendar was decreed by Julius Caesar, before the birth of Our Lord, but it was not accurate. He did not know exactly how long a year was and until a few hundred years ago we did not know the earth went round the sun...”

“Does it Reverend? I see it rising and crossing the sky. It moves.”

“It looks as if it does, but we - the earth - are doing the turning, even though we can't feel it. To continue, originally the idea was to start the year in the spring, when the day and the night are the same length, but you may have noticed that the New Year on 21<sup>st</sup> March is not that day. It doesn't come until April now, because we counted wrongly.”

“They don't count the same as us in France. When I take my boat over the Channel, they tell us different dates.”

“Yes! Well the Government has decided, we should be the same as Europe - France, Italy, Spain.”

“Do we have to join the Roman church again?”

“No, No never! It’s just so merchants can make proper arrangements when they want to trade with those countries. The crux of the matter is that after Wednesday next, which is the 2<sup>nd</sup> September, we shall have Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> September.”

The congregation gasped and some of the ladies screamed, while the children merely puzzled, though one poor girl started to cry,

“Ma, it’s my birthday on the sixth! Won’t I have it? Won’t I be a year older? Will I still be nine years old?”

Her mother comforted her and reassured her she would have a birthday present and be ten years old, but it would be on Thursday. The older people were divided. Those who thought the day of their death was preordained, feared that twelve days had been stolen from them. Others didn’t care.

When the congregation calmed down, Reverend Wilton spoke again,

“The other item in the law is that New Year will now start on 1<sup>st</sup> January and Easter will have to be calculated differently, so it will not be on 21<sup>st</sup> March, but according to how many full moons have passed since Christmas.”

“What about Christmas?”

“Christmas will be on 25<sup>th</sup> December as always.”

“Won’t that be twelve days too soon?”

“Well, to make certain, let’s have twelve days of Christmas, stopping on 6<sup>th</sup> January.”

The congregation gave a cheer, it must be good news.