New Yearâ€™s Auld Lang Syne

Contributed by Wes Riddle
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Old times and ‘the good old days’ of one’s youth, etc., is what is meant by the Scottish phrase auld lang syne. It has been a custom, probably as long as the years have changed, to run over in one’s mind the things of the past and to consider one’s hopes for the upcoming year. The custom of auld lang syne involves fond sharing of memories with friends, usually around a table with some convivial drinking—and as the New Year rings in at the stroke of midnight New Year’s Eve, to lift a toast to the future and wish each other well, and the very best part, to share a memorable kiss with the one you love. It’s a good and healthy custom if you have your designated driver and adhere to moderation, or celebrate at home. The purpose isn’t a drunken stupor or blackout after all! Instead, the occasion—as the old year wanes and the new one starts, as Father Time figuratively leaves the scene and a baby takes his place—is all about fellowship, about sharing laughter, about enjoying a little levity. Which is ironic, because memories sometime involve pain and regret, if nothing else because ‘time stands still for no man’ and every succeeding year brings changes—including the change of getting older. But Father Time doesn’t just drop off a cliff. Like an old soldier, so to speak, he doesn’t die—he just fades away. The sound of the song “Auld Lang Syne” is sad, but the customary indulgence of those notes is not a long cry in your beer! Rather, it is to quickly dry your tears if you have any, and to accept the inevitable moving on from the past. The rationale is this, no matter what your situation: life ain’t over til it’s over—and I ain’t given up yet! The American is a boxer by nature and by choice, a scrapper in the field of dreams. Hence, the American custom of auld lang syne is ultimately an accentuation on the positive, an appraisal but an optimistic one: taking stock good and bad, but making every plan for progress and doing better next year. The goal is around the next bend; we’ll have it someday for sure, and we’ll understand every single pothole in the sweet bye and bye. When I was a youngster, I recall the adults on one occasion shortly after Christmas looking at the coins in their pockets. They would read the date off a penny or nickel or dime and try to recall what that year had meant to them—where they had been, what they had accomplished. “I remember the man whose head is on this dime—FDR led us so well and gave us renewed hope—I always think of him like a man on horseback riding at the front of a column, bringing us out from the desert of despair and Great Depression into the Promised Land!” “Kennedy’s half-dollar is so beautiful—I wish he’d been able to accomplish all he wanted—oh God, I remember where I was November 22nd, 1963 like it were yesterday, don’t you?” “Oh this was the year we attended the World’s Fair in New York City and had so much fun.” On and on, I heard the grown-ups talk about years fifteen and twenty years removed, dates before my birth—times for which I had very little understanding, times for which the backs of pennies and nickels were sometimes different. Their descriptions helped me build my mental impressions of the olden days. But the reality of time before one’s own experience is always a leap of faith. I mean you know it must have been, but you weren’t there. Likewise, the future is a leap of faith. The sun will come up tomorrow, you can bet your bottom dollar. I reckon you could lose that bet, however, and millions of years from now somebody will but what the hey! Auld lang syne is about taking those leaps of faith, backwards and forwards, and reminding ourselves there’s continuity in this universe and in our lives. Continuity implies purpose and design, and there’s a comfort knowing as we look behind and yonder, the pathway lies forever. Possibilities are endless and crooked paths made plain. A line from horizon to horizon curves to form a cosmic smile in the distance, with all the colors of a Rainbow. Happy New Year, and Godspeed.

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