

INTRODUCTION

The practical defects of the present Gregorian calendar have long been apparent to those whose activities have brought them into close relationship with this time-measuring unit. For as long as a half century, to search no further back, there has been speculation over the more perfect division of the true solar year. In the period 1910-1914 the possibilities of improvement were being considered and discussed in scientific circles and international associations and congresses. The close of the war saw it again brought to public notice and its discussion has been steadily increasing under the impetus of commercial, industrial and scientific interest in more accurate records, greater convenience, economy and efficiency, so far as these are influenced by the time divisions of the year.

The subject of calendar reform is given weight by the fact that the League of Nations in 1923 assigned a committee to study and act upon it, and as a result of its activity national committees were recommended and to some extent have been organized or are being considered in the various countries, for the study and discussion of reform; and, further, that the calling of an international conference is an objective that appears in a fair way to being realized in the near future. In addition to this interest organizations of various kinds have special committees studying the question, conventions and conferences, international, national, scientific and other have given recognition to it in their discussions or by the adoption of resolutions, and there is apparently some governmental approval of reform. Not the least important consideration is the fact that pressure is being steadily exerted by interested bodies and individuals to defin-

itely influence public opinion in favor of a proposed change. Such definite and studied direction of thought calls, at the least, for a clear and understanding attitude; that the subject may be wisely met.

Although plans proposed for the reform of the calendar are many, embodying every conceivable change from the mere lengthening of February to the changing of the beginning or length of the year, yet the publicity given the thirteen month year scheme, variously called the International Fixed Calendar, the Comte, Cotsworth, or the Eastman plan, has given it preponderantly favorable consideration in our country; and the action of the League of Nations Committee in analyzing a hundred and eighty-five plans for calendar reform and eliminating as impracticable or otherwise undesirable all but two main groups, has tended to narrow advocacy to these leading schemes. These two groups of reform are the equalizing of the quarters of the year, and the re-division of the year into thirteen months in place of twelve. Intercalary days may be considered an essential part of the latter plan, although an occasional intercalary week is sometimes suggested in place of such blank days, since it is proposed to make this calendar fixed and unchangeable. The equalizing of quarters plan is advocated both with and without intercalary days or an intercalary week, according to whether a fixed calendar is considered essential or not. Some minor differences exist among advocates of either groups of plans, such as the beginning of the week on Sunday or Monday, the considering of the intercalary day the last or the first day of the year or the placing it elsewhere, but in the essentials of the plans there is substantial agreement. There is also a considerable movement active in bringing about stabilized date for Easter.

The question is an international one by reason of the fact that the adoption of a reformed calendar by any one or a few leading nations would be largely impracticable.

The world is closely welded together and interdependent at innumerable points of contact. The action of certain nations abroad in changing to the Gregorian calendar since the late war has brought an important portion of the world under this system of time reckoning, and the breaking of this widespread conformity to a common chronology would be highly unfortunate. It is upon the action of an international conference as influenced and approved by national action that a change in the calendar would doubtless ultimately rest. The immediate interest of advocates of reform at the present time is related to the possibility of bringing about a decision in favor of reform during the current year. This would give time for necessary scientific, statistical and other preparation for beginning a new calendar reckoning with the first of January 1933, the nearest year in which Sunday coincides with the first day of the year, and thus permits a change without unnecessary dislocation. The year 1939 would be the next convenient year for establishing such a change.

The present number of the Reference Shelf follows the practice of the series in presenting impartially reprints of some of the best and most representative discussions available of a general, affirmative and negative nature. A brief summing up some of the leading arguments pro and con is included. A fairly full and classified bibliography is given for the convenience of those wishing to pursue further reading.

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