

Reform of the calendar [To be concluded]

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REFORM OF THE CALENDAR.

The modern movement for the simplification on reasonable and practical lines of the Gregorian calendar, as at present in vogue throughout the civilised world, originated about the beginning of the present century. It had already aroused intense interest, evoked widespread approval, and achieved rapidly increased momentum when the outbreak of the Great War effectively checked it. This check was merely temporary, and with the advent of Peace acute minds in many lands which had formerly been bent to the solution of the problem of calendar reform have again reverted to it.

This movement has as its object the removal of the anomalies, inequalities and disadvantages of the existing calendar.

The death of the late Pope Benedict XV and the election of his successor, Pope Pius XI, has given rise to the hope that the latter may see fit to perfect the achievement of his illustrious predecessor, Pope Gregory XII, by lending the weight of his great authority towards the attainment of the end in view.

The purpose of the present article is to set forth a simple statement of the genesis and progressive steps in the development of the project for the adoption of a new calendar, and at the same time to exhibit clearly what are the proposals for the modification of the existing calendar. It will also be shewn who were the pioneers of the movement, so that credit may be given to those to whom credit is due.

During the past fifty years there has been present in many reflective minds a growing realisation of the imperfections for practical purposes of the existing calendar. As a result of this, eminent men, prior to the end of last century, put forward from time to time suggestions or proposals of reform, more or less tentative and academic in character, to which allusion will be made later.

What has been designated the "modern movement" for calendar reform, however, may be said to date from 1900, when M. Louis A. Grosclaude, Professor of Mathematics at the College of Geneva, made his notable contribution to the subject.

In March of that year M. Grosclaude, at a meeting of the horological section of the Geneva Society of Arts, explained his project for the first time. A report of this conference was given in the *Journal Suisse d'Horlogerie* for May, 1900. M. Grosclaude's proposals were published in a large number of the newspapers and periodicals* of both hemispheres and encountered very few objections. They were discussed at the International Congresses of Chambers of Commerce held at Milan in 1906 and at Prague in 1908. At the latter Congress the question of a fixed date for Easter was also raised: and it was decided that, as the time was not yet ripe for arriving at a firm decision, the question should be remitted to the next International Congress to be held in London in June, 1910, as the first item on the Agenda.

Towards the end of 1909 the Permanent Committee of

* See among others:—*Cosmos*, May 1900; *Revue Scientifique* (*Revue rose*), 16th June, 1900; *La Croix*, 25th June, 1900; *La Gazette de Lausanne*, 20th June, 1900; *Oriental Advertiser*, Constantinople, 27th June, 1900; *La Revue de Statistique*, 8th July, 1900; *Berliner Tageblatt*, 1st July, 1900; *Das Echo*, Berlin, 6th Sept., 1900; *Leipziger Uhrmacherzeitung*, 1st Oct., 1900; *Memorial de la Librairie Française*, 20th Sept., 1900; *Congrès International de Chronométrie*, at Paris session of 3rd Aug., 1900; *National Suisse*, 28th Jan., 1910; *Journal du Dimanche*, 3rd June, 1910; *Bulletin Industriel et Commercial Suisse*, 1st March, 1910—15th June, 1910—1st December, 1910—1st February, 1913—15th July, 1914; etc., etc.

the International Congress of Chambers of Commerce gave effect to this decision by placing on the Agenda of the London Congress, 1910, the following questions:—

Establishment of a fixed date for Easter;

Unification and simplification of the Gregorian calendar.

At this point may be given a condensed statement of the salient features of M. Grosclaude's scheme for the revision of the calendar. In view of the approaching London Congress, 1910, he was invited by the "*Bulletin Commercial et Industriel Suisse*" to contribute an article on the subject for the information of the delegates to this Congress. This article was published in their issue of 1st March, 1910. The chief points of the project, as detailed by its author in the article referred to, are set out in abridged form in the following paragraphs.

M. GROSCLAUDE'S PROJECT.

Our ancestors have bequeathed to us a calendar which has numerous inconveniences, a fact recognised by everyone. There is no regularity in any of its parts; the months are of unequal duration even to the extent of three days; similarly the first half of the year and the second half are unequal.

Then the variability of the days of the week in relation to their dates is such that the competent authorities are compelled to decide afresh each year regarding the dates of events which recur periodically, such as the assembly of Parliament, opening of the Law Courts, vacations of schools and universities, etc. It is impossible to infer from the decision taken in any one year what will happen in the following year.

Another great drawback is the constant necessity for consulting an almanack in regard to any given date. There are very few persons who can tell from memory a few months in advance the dates which correspond to the days of the week.

Nothing reveals more clearly the modern dissatisfaction with our Gregorian calendar than the numerous propositions for modifying it.

Lack of space forbids a complete historical survey of the calendar in general. Let it suffice to say that until 1582 the Julian calendar was in use, which assumed that the year consisted of exactly $365\frac{1}{4}$ days. Since that date the Gregorian calendar has been generally employed, which takes account of the fact that the year is a little shorter.

(Parenthetically it may be of interest to recall that the Julian calendar year of $365\frac{1}{4}$ days was a little longer than the astronomical Solar year, so that when the Gregorian calendar was introduced in 1582 the accumulated error of the preceding sixteen centuries had to be rectified by the suppression of ten days—the 10th of October in that year becoming the 20th. As the result of this suppression there were people who protested that their lives had been shortened by ten days. With equal cogency it was probably urged that their lives, on the contrary, had been lengthened by ten days, because the man who, under the Old Style, was doomed to die on the 10th October was, under the New Style, granted a respite until the 20th. Further, Great Britain revolved the matter for 170 years before deciding to adopt the Gregorian calendar, which came into force in this country in 1752—a striking instance of "masterly inactivity" or "insular prejudice" or what you will. The Orthodox Greek Church, the dominant Church of Russia and other Christian States of the Near East, never accepted the Gregorian calendar, but still bases its year on the Julian calendar, with the result that the error of ten days in the sixteenth century has now increased to fourteen days, which is the reason for New Year's Day in the countries affected

being two weeks later than ours. The Russian Bolshevik Government, however, adopted the Gregorian calendar on 14th February, 1918. For further technical details on this subject it is suggested that the *Encyclopædia Britannica* be consulted.)

We believe that any revised calendar, if it is to have the slightest chance of being adopted by different peoples and their Governments, must fulfil the two prime conditions following:—

- (1) It must interfere as little as possible with acquired habits.
- (2) It must be simple enough to be easily retained in the memory by everyone.

There are numerous examples of the difficulty of getting the public to change acquired habits; and the previous tentative proposals for the reform of the calendar have proved unacceptable because they did not take this fact sufficiently into account.

We believe that the above conditions are met by the project of reform which we now proceed to explain.

To establish a calendar we must start from the fact that the astronomical year comprises 365.2422166 days.

As it is impossible to base a calendar on a number so complex, the year has been increased to $365\frac{1}{4}$ days; this increase is compensated for under the Gregorian system by the suppression of three days in every four centuries. If, however, we round off this number to 365 days, this shortening of the year will be made up by the addition of one day, the 29th of February, every fourth year.

But 365 is only divisible by 5 and 73, two numbers on which it is not possible to establish a practical combination.

Now, why not replace 365 by the number 364, a number which is in the first place divisible by four, corresponding to the four quarters of the year, and by 7, the number of days in the week?

The odd day (the 365th) would be placed at the beginning of each year as a special day which would bear quite naturally the name of "New Year's Day."

Every fourth year one day would be inserted named "Leap Year Day."

If now we agree that the day following "New Year's Day" shall be the 1st of January, we can then divide the year into four quarters of 91 days each, and, by a happy coincidence, each of these quarters into 13 weeks exactly.

It will then be sufficient to memorize one of these quarters in order to know them all.

Again, so as not to change our acquired habits, we divide the quarter into three months of 30, 30 and 31 days respectively. Only the last month of each quarter would have 31 days, and the last day of each quarter would always be a Sunday if we commence each quarter with a Monday.

We should thus conserve established usage in speaking of half-years, quarters, months and weeks. In this there appears to lie a strong recommendation for the acceptance by the public of a modification of the existing calendar.

INVARIABLE CALENDAR

1st Quarter	JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH
2nd "	APRIL	MAY	JUNE
3rd "	JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER
4th "	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER
Monday	1 8 15 22 29	— 6 13 20 27	— 4 11 18 25
Tuesday	2 9 16 23 30	— 7 14 21 28	— 5 12 19 26
Wednesday	3 10 17 24 —	1 8 15 22 29	— 6 13 20 27
Thursday	4 11 18 25 —	2 9 16 23 30	— 7 14 21 28
Friday	5 12 19 26 —	3 10 17 24 —	1 8 15 22 29
Saturday	6 13 20 27 —	4 11 18 25 —	2 9 16 23 30
Sunday	7 14 21 28 —	5 12 19 26 —	3 10 17 24 31

LONDON CONGRESS 1910.

The movement for reform made a great stride forward when in June, 1910, the International Congress of Chambers of Commerce met in London, and after full discussion passed unanimously the following resolution:—

"It is desirable to establish a fixed international calendar."

"It is desirable to establish, by international agreement, a fixed date for Easter."

"The Congress instructs the Permanent Committee to invite one of the Governments to convoke a diplomatic official Conference with the object of establishing a fixed date for Easter and a fixed international calendar."

During the discussion of the foregoing resolution the wish was expressed that the Swiss Government be invited to take the initiative in the matter of the diplomatic official conference referred to. The official representatives of this Government (Dr. Carlin, Swiss Minister in London; and National Councillors M. Gugelmann, Dr. Sulzer-Ziegler, and Dr. Alfred Georg) promised to lay the matter before their Government, which was duly carried out by means of an exhaustive Report.

This Congress marked a distinct epoch in the history of the calendar reform movement. Interesting memoranda were submitted to the Congress by certain members who have taken a prominent part in the movement and have made important contributions towards the elucidation and solution of the problems involved.

SWISS GOVERNMENT ACTION.

Following the representations made to the Swiss Government by their official representatives at the London Congress 1910, as already mentioned, the Federal Council, in February, 1911, decided to approach the following Governments:—France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy, Great Britain, Russia, Spain, the Netherlands, and Belgium whether they would be willing to accept an invitation from Switzerland to an International Conference on the Reform of the Gregorian Calendar and the Fixation of the Date of Easter. France and the Netherlands accepted; Great Britain answered that they would do as other Great Powers; Belgium was willing in principle, but thought that nothing could be done without the advice of the Vatican and of the Orthodox Church; Germany adopted the same attitude; and Austria-Hungary refused. No indication is given regarding Italy, Russia, or Spain, and it is understood, therefore, that their attitude was negative.

On the subject of the reform of the calendar and of the fixation of the date of Easter, the Chief Adviser of the Swiss Government and their spokesman at the International Congress of the Chambers of Commerce was Dr. Alfred Georg, President of the Chamber of Commerce of Geneva and owner of the *Bulletin Industriel et Commercial Suisse* already referred to.

ATTITUDE OF THE HOLY SEE.

In 1912 the Holy See offered no active opposition, but adopted an attitude of "wait and see." Since then the question has not moved.

BOSTON CONGRESS 1912.

At the Fifth International Congress of Chambers of Commerce, held at Boston, U.S.A., in September, 1912, the action of the Fourth Congress (London 1910) with regard to fixing the date of Easter and the adoption of a revised calendar was unanimously confirmed, the president announcing that the Swiss Government had, in accordance with the suggestion then made, taken steps to convene an International Conference on the matter.

(To be concluded.)