

### The Reform of the Calendar.

SINCE the War a number of ingenious schemes have been put forward for the reform of the calendar. Such an important step should not be taken unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, but the advantages claimed should be considered, the extent of the demand for it assessed, and the possibility of finding a scheme which would meet general approval carefully weighed. The League of Nations, being in a position to consult the various bodies which could give authoritative expression to opinion on the subject and the aid of which would be required in carrying out any changes proposed, undertook a full inquiry. It appointed a committee, with Prof. van Eysinga of Leyden as chairman, and with representatives of the Holy See, the Orthodox Church, the Church of England, the International Chamber of Commerce, and the International Astronomical Union upon it. This committee has recently issued a short and valuable report.<sup>1</sup>

The principal defect in the Gregorian Calendar arises from the unequal lengths of months, quarters, and half-years, which introduce a certain amount of irregularity in statistics, accounts, commercial and transport figures. This is increased somewhat because different days of the week are of unequal value as regards volume of trade, and thus one year or one quarter is not strictly comparable with another.

Minor defects are that special tables are required by banks in their calculations of interest, and that dates of periodical events, for example, the opening of Parliament, cannot be fixed without reference to a calendar. As many as 185 schemes of reform were received by the committee, including 33 from France, 27 from the United States, 24 from Germany, and 5 from Great Britain. The minimum change proposed was to take a day from August and give it to February. A second suggestion made the months of three of the quarters of the year consist of 30, 30, and 31 days respectively, and the last quarter of 30, 31, and 31 days. The question may well be asked whether the advantages are sufficient to justify the change.

A more radical reform is obtained by the use of one day without name in ordinary years and two such days in leap-years. The remaining days of the year may then be divided into 52 weeks, which may be arranged as four quarters of thirteen weeks, the months consisting of 30, 30, and 31 days, or as 13 months of 4 weeks each. The advantages and disadvantages of these two schemes are compared, and preference on the whole given to the former. The committee is satisfied, and

most people will agree with it, that there is no general demand for these changes, which would be strongly opposed by many religious bodies. Without general assent, confusion would result, and it may be remembered that the Gregorian Calendar was introduced in 1582, adopted in Scotland in 1600, but not in England until 1751, and in eastern Europe only six years ago.

The committee next considers the question of fixing or 'stabilising' Easter. At present Easter Sunday varies between March 22 and April 25. This wide range makes difficulties in the arrangement of school and university terms and of public holidays. Many commercial transactions and transport services are prejudiced, in particular, business dealing with textiles, articles of fashion, and the hotel-keeping industry. There appears to be a consensus of opinion in these circles that the second Sunday in April would be the most convenient date. The committee favours a slightly different date, namely, the day following the second Saturday, in order to avoid the contingency of the festival of the Annunciation and Passion Sunday both falling on the same date.

The committee has made general inquiries of the attitude of the heads of different Christian Churches on the stabilisation of Easter. It is agreed that there is no dogmatic reason against a fixed date. It appears that the Church of England and the Greek Church are ready to accept the change if the Church of Rome also accepts it. The Holy See does not consider that there is sufficient reason for changing a date handed down by immemorial tradition and sanctioned by councils from early times, and would not be prepared to consider the question except on the advice of an Œcumenical Council. The Protestant Churches of Europe and America and the Jewish Community raise no objections to the proposal.

The report of the committee of the League of Nations shows that there is a general belief, certainly in England, that the stabilisation of Easter would bring substantial advantages and a wish to see the change made. As there are no difficulties of dogma involved, it may be hoped that ecclesiastical concurrence is not impossible. Incidentally, uniformity in keeping Easter will be secured between the different Churches. At the present time the Greek Church uses the position of the moon to determine Easter, while the tables of Clavius are still retained by the Roman and Anglican Churches. Sometimes the two methods give the same date; frequently they differ a week, and occasionally a month.

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<sup>1</sup> Publication of the League of Nations, viii. Transit, 1926, viii. 6. (London: Constable and Co.) 3s. 6d.

### Obituary.

PROF. J. D. F. GILCHRIST.

PROF. J. D. F. GILCHRIST, who died recently in Capetown at the age of sixty years, had been in South Africa for thirty-one years. Gilchrist's early university days were spent at St. Andrews and Edinburgh. At one time he had thought of entering the Presbyterian ministry, but after coming under the influence of inspiring leaders in natural science at St. Andrews and Edinburgh, he definitely resolved to

pursue a biological career. After a period at Munich and Zürich, and at biological stations, more especially that of St. Andrews, he was appointed, on the recommendation of the late Sir John Murray, of the *Challenger*, and of Prof. McIntosh, St. Andrews, to the position of Government Marine Biologist at the Cape of Good Hope.

Gilchrist was probably the first to hold the title of Government Biologist in any country, and in his later days he was wont to tell his friends about the weary,