

It is a significant fact that at the Washington Conference the principle of Universal Time obtained unanimous recognition from the delegates of so many nationalities. It is a presage that the peoples whom they represent will before long be fully impressed with the belief that a system of reckoning time uniformly throughout the globe is really the one rational system by which it can be noted, and the only system which will meet the demands of the human family in coming years. It is only step by step that a reform so great can be carried out. Moreover, although the difficulties to be overcome are undoubtedly serious, this much may be said with confidence, that they are less formidable than those which have already been conquered. A few years back the very question of a universal time for all nations was a theory not only new in itself but it was held by many to be wild and Utopian, and so impracticable as to be unworthy of consideration. In 1878 the subject could not command a hearing at the British Association! Since 1878 the arguments advanced to point out the necessity of change have, however, obtained attention, and a general movement for reform has been inaugurated. Scientific and practical men and learned societies in both hemispheres have taken part in the consideration of the question. It has formed the subject of discussion at International Congresses at Venice and Rome. The President and Congress of the United States have been induced to take decisive action in connection with it. The Governments of twenty-five civilized nations have aided in its development. The International Washington Conference itself has greatly promoted the solution of the problem by coming to an unanimous determination on the essential principles to be observed. In several countries the recommendations of the Conference have already in part been acted on, and changes have been effected which a few years back were not even dreamed of.

If so much has been accomplished within the eight years since the scheme of reform was first promulgated, is it too much to expect that the public mind will be prepared in the more advanced communities to accept the final step in a like period?

In fourteen or fifteen years we pass into another century. Is it taking too sanguine a view to suggest that by that time all nations will be willing to accept the change, and that the first day of January in the Twentieth Century may appropriately be inaugurated by the adoption of one uniform system of reckoning time throughout the world?

I learn from the recent lecture of the Astronomer Royal that the Board of Visitors of Greenwich Observatory have unanimously recommended that in accordance with the resolutions of the Washington Conference, the Astronomical day should in the English Nautical Almanac be arranged from the year 1891 (the earliest practicable date) to begin at Greenwich midnight so as to agree with the civil reckoning, and further that steps have been taken to give effect to this recommendation; thus in a few years this source of confusion to sailors navigating ships using the Nautical Almanac—embracing at least seventy per cent. of the tonnage of the world—will be removed. The distinguished Russian Astronomer, Struve, has suggested that all astronomers throughout the world should simultaneously abandon Astronomical Time and bring their notation into harmony with the civil reckoning. He further suggests that this reform should be introduced into the publications of observatories at the initial day of the century.¹ The same epoch

¹ In reference to this the Astronomer Royal, Greenwich, says (Oct., 1886) "it would be intolerable to have a fundamental question of time-reckoning left open for fifteen years."