

It may be well to state that, in the absence of a common and accepted standard for the computation of time for other than astronomical purposes, embarrassments are experienced in the ordinary affairs of modern commerce; that this embarrassment is especially felt since the extension of telegraphic and railway communications has joined states and continents possessing independent and widely separated meridional standards of time; that the subject of a common meridian has been, for several years past, discussed in this country and in Europe by commercial and scientific bodies, and the need of a general agreement upon a single standard recognized; and that, in recent European conferences especially, favour was shown to the suggestion that, as the United States possesses the greatest longitudinal extension of any country traversed by railway and telegraph lines, initiatory measures for holding an international convention to consider so important a subject should be taken by this Government."

The President, while convinced of the good to flow eventually from the adoption of a common time unit, applicable throughout the globe, thinks, however, that the effort now to be made should be to reach by consultation, a conclusion as to the advisability of assembling an international congress with the object of finally adopting a common meridian. He, therefore, abstains from extending an invitation for a meeting at an assigned day until he has ascertained the views of the leading governments of the world as to whether such international conference is deemed desirable.

I am accordingly directed by the President to request you to bring the matter to the attention of the Government of _____, through the Minister of Foreign Affairs, with a view to learning whether its appreciation of the benefits to accrue to the intimate intercourse of civilized peoples from the consideration and adoption of the suggested common standard of time so far coincides with that of this Government as to lead it to accept an invitation to participate in an international conference at a date to be designated in the near future.

You may leave a copy of this instruction with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, and request the views of his Government thereon, at as early a day as may be conveniently practicable.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant.

FRED'K T. FRELINGHUYSEN.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, December 1st, 1883.

SIR,—By a circular instruction of October 23rd, 1882, you were made acquainted with, (the language of,) an Act of Congress approved August 3rd, 1882, authorizing and requesting the President to extend to other Governments an invitation to appoint Delegates to meet in the city of Washington for the purpose of fixing upon a Meridian proper to be employed as a common zero of longitude and standard of time-reckoning throughout the world; and you were instructed to bring the matter before the attention of the Government to which you are accredited and to inform it that the President deemed it advisable to abstain from the issuance of the formal invitation contemplated, until through preliminary consultation the views of the leading Governments of the world, as to the desirability of holding such an International Conference would be ascertained.