

ening the world's mental labour by decimalising, in many countries, coinage, weights and measures, instances of incomplete decimalisation will be alluded to, and a reason given for the hope that we shall soon see the reform enlarging its scope and freeing us more and more from the wretched trammels of ancient servitudes.

Early Systems of Numeration

The earliest system of numbers was doubtless based on halves and doubles, and there are many native tribes in America whose numerals only extend to four. Some savages, indeed, like many of the Australian aborigines, have not yet got to that, and express more than three by a noun signifying multitude. Most tribes, however, soon progressed so far as to count five, being the number of the fingers of the hand, whence it was not difficult to reach the conception of ten. In Homer's *Odyssey* (8. 411-414) the old sea-god Proteus is spoken of as counting his herd of seals by fives, before going to rest among them, but Aristotle, a few hundred years later, says that in his time almost all nations, civilized or barbarous, used a decimal-system, except the Thracians, who only counted to four, and said they could not remember any further quantity.

The earliest records of the Egyptians show that they had a decimal system, and there we seem to find the origin of the figures now used as signs of numbers. The Chinese have had for thousands of years a very complete decimal system, and use with great rapidity and accuracy an abacus based on fives and tens—a refinement, possibly, on our friend the clown's counters.