

SCORES AND TALLIES.

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THE survival of the practice of counting sheep by the score in our country districts very well illustrates this ancient Celtic vigesimal practice. When the new county voter (called in his non-political aspect Hodge or Giles) wishes to number a flock of sheep, he does so by first counting out twenty—the counting itself being often done, not by the ordinary numerals—one, two, three, four—but by the old half-Celtic “rhyming score,” “Eena, deena, dina, dus, Catla, weela, weila, wuss,” and so forth, up to twenty. There, he has reached his higher unit, the score; in other words, one man, regarded as barefoot. So he makes a nick in a piece of wood, and begins his rhyming singsong over again. Thus he counts score after score, till he reaches at last the full number, say eight score and seventeen. At that he rests. He doesn’t translate the numbers into the decimal notation; why should he? It would mean far less in his mind than his native numbers. Eight score and seventeen are to him a far more real and realizable amount than one hundred and seventy-seven. He sticks still to the vigesimal system. Twenty is for Giles the one true higher unit.

A tally in its origin was pretty much the same thing as a score, but it grows at last by usage and the courtesy of language into something rather different. It means in the final resort a piece of wood *taillé*—that is to say, nicked or scored. But the French origin of the word points back to its being the offspring of the more civilized and Latinized decimal system, which replaced (for all save Giles and Hodge) our old native English

and Welsh method of courting by twenties. Moreover, it has now become inseparable from the very idea of a tally that it must needs tally with something or other. This sense of the word arises from the habit of giving the two parties to a bargain each a cut stick, on which the amount at issue between them was duly recorded by means of notches. As these sticks corresponded, or ought exactly to correspond, with one another, a tally came to be popularly thought of as necessarily implying correspondence. In the English exchequer—always conservative—such little bits of notched wood were given as receipts so late as the end of the eighteenth century; but at last they were accompanied by a written discharge as well, and only remained as a pure ceremonial and administrative survival.

It will further illustrate the absolute dependence of arithmetic upon the human fingers (including toes) if we recollect that in many savage languages the very words used to describe the abstract numbers are derived from the fingers or toes themselves. Thus, five in such a tongue will be the same word as “hand”; seven will be expressed by “one hand, two fingers”; and twenty will be put in the graphic form of “a whole man,” or “one man finished.”

People count long before they think of making definite signs or symbols for numbers, and when they begin to make symbols at all the earliest and simplest are mere long rows of notches or pebbles equal in sum to the number thought of. But in time picture-writing begins to develop itself; and then we get the