

THE CREATOR'S DECIMAL SYSTEM.



The greatest drawbacks to the advancement of civilization are the legacies of the ignorance of the past, and it is only in new and progressive countries that any successful effort can be made to leave aside the highway of ignorance in order to adapt the requirements of the age to a better path. I was never more forcibly struck with this fact than in the year 1870, while ascending the Kaministiquia River, near Fort William, at the head of Lake Superior. An Indian path, leading to the high ground above the falls, wound its devious way through the forest for a distance of about three-quarters of a mile. The Indians had been in the habit of traversing this path from time immemorial, and along it they carried their canoes and luggage. In the year I speak of the Royal Engineers in Her Majesty's service shortened the distance by about half its length, by cutting a straight path up the hill. In many similar respects the world is held back by the customs and habits that have been handed down to us from prehistoric times.

In no respect can this be better illustrated than in what I now propose to explain. The world owes its present numerical system to the simple-minded calculations of prehistoric man in the remote ages previous to the invention of letters, and we received our units and tens from the digits on the hands of the calcula-