



THE NUMBER SEVEN

Source: *The Maine Journal of Education*, Vol. 7, No. 8 (AUGUST, 1873), pp. 296-300

Published by: Sage Publications, Inc.

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44860434>

Accessed: 10-07-2019 13:53 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

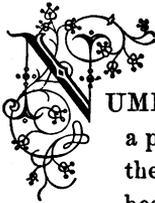
Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Sage Publications, Inc. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Maine Journal of Education*

THE NUMBER SEVEN.



NUMBER seven, in all ages and in all countries, has had a peculiar significance. Among the Hebrews it was called the number of perfection. Apuleius speaks of dipping the head seven times in the sea for purification, Pythagoras taught its efficacy, and Cicero in the vision of Scipio calls *seven* a complete number which is the 'connecting principle of almost all things.' The learned Prof. Bush says in his Notes on Genesis, that 'the original word for seven comes from a root, signifying to be *full, complete, entirely made up.*' No other numeral is used so frequently in the Bible, and the septenate structure of many passages is remarkable.

'On the seventh day God ended his work which he had made.' The week of seven days was established, the last to be a day of rest; the seventh year was made a year of rest, not only for man and beast, but even for the fallow ground; and at the expiration of seven sabbaths of years, the year of Jubilee allowed liberty and homesteads to all the inhabitants. Enoch was the 7th from Adam, Abraham the 21st, and St. Matthew enumerates forty-two generations from Abraham to Christ.

Noah had 7 days' notice of the flood, during which time he gathered the clean beasts and fowls of the air into the ark by sevens, and in the 7th month the ark rested on Mt. Ararat. He sent out a dove which returned, but after 7 days he again sent forth the dove, which brought back the welcome olive leaf, and after 7 days more he repeated the experiment but lost the dove.

Jacob served 7 years for Rachel, made a mistake in the bride, and served 7 years longer, and when he met Esau he bowed 7 times before him. Pharaoh's dreams of the 7 years of plenty and 7 years of famine were apparently of 7 fat and of 7 lean kine, and of 7 full ears and of 7 suckers. Joseph mourned for his father 7 days, and Zipporah the wife of Moses was the 7th daughter of Jethro. Moses came out of the cloud on Mt. Sinai on the 7th day, and he made 7 lamps of pure gold, and on the 7th day no manna fell. The feast

of the tabernacle lasted 7 days, and on various occasions 7 animals of various kinds were to be offered. Jericho was besieged 7 days when 7 priests, with 7 trumpets of rams' horns, went 7 times round the city, but on the 7th day they went round 7 times and the walls fell. Solomon's temple was 7 years in building. Job's 7 sons were slain in one day, and Homer relates that Achilles slew the 7 brothers of Andromache in a single day. The dead son of the Shunammite sneezed 7 times and opened his eyes. The servant of Elisha went to the top of Carmel 7 times to see the probabilities of rain.

Naaman the Syrian was told to bathe 7 times in the Jordan, and Nebuchadnezzar went with the cattle grazing 7 years. We also read of 7 golden candlesticks, 7 seals, 7 loaves, 7 baskets full, 7 devils, 7 deacons, a 7 headed beast, 7 angels with the 7 last plagues, and 7 golden vials.

Samson's marriage-feast lasted 7 days, and he told Delilah that 7 green withs would hold him bound, also that she could fasten him to a beam by the 7 locks of his hair. The loss of his 7 locks quite conquered him.

The Seven Churches of Asia were at Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamus, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. The seven Catholic or general epistles are the three of St. John, two of St. Peter, and one each of St. James and St. Jude. The Lord's Prayer contains seven petitions, and the Apostles' creed has seven articles relating to the divinity and seven to the humanity of Christ. Christians are enjoined to make 7 additions to the faith, viz.: virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity. St. John in the Apocalypse often groups 7 names together, as '*Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might.*' Also, '*Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.*' Such groupings cannot be accidental. Solomon says, seven things are an abomination to the Lord, viz.: pride, lying, murder, jealousy, mischief-making, perjury, and slander. It has been maintained that seven evils proceeded from the fall of man, and hence are seven sacraments as remedies, viz.: original sin is to be taken away by baptism, mortal sins by penitence, venial sins by extreme unction, ignorance by ordination, weakness of spirit by confirmation, frailty of the flesh by matrimony, and the evil nature by

the Eucharist. The seven virtues have been classified as three theological virtues, *faith, hope, and charity*, and the four cardinal virtues, *prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance*. The Catholic Church teaches seven corporal works of mercy, viz.: to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to visit and ransom captives, to harbor the harborless, to visit the sick, and to bury the dead. Also seven spiritual works of mercy, viz.: to correct the sinner, to instruct the ignorant, to counsel the doubtful, to comfort the sorrowful, to bear wrongs patiently, to forgive all injuries, and to pray for the living and the dead.

The seven deadly sins are pride, covetousness, lust, wrath, gluttony, envy, and sloth, which have the seven opposite virtues of humility, liberality, chastity, meekness, temperance, brotherly love, and diligence.

In performing the rite of *suttee*, the Hindoo widow walks 7 times around the pyre, repeating *mantras* or prayers, scattering rice and sprinkling water on the bystanders. The corpse of the husband is carried round 7 times and placed in the lap of the widow, when the fire is kindled to consume them both.

Æneas lost all his vessels but 7, he saw 7 stags and killed them, and was afterwards told by the Cumæan Sibyl to sacrifice 7 bullocks and 7 unspotted ewes.

Seven witnesses were sufficient to prove a Roman nuncupative will, and after the Roman kings, farms of *septemjugera* or 7 acres were allotted to each citizen. Cincinnatus, Dentatus, Fabricus, Regulus, &c., found 7 acres enough for their wants.

Seven years' absence of a husband, without intelligence of his whereabouts, justifies the marriage of his wife, *a la* Enoch Arden's, without subjecting her to the charge of bigamy; also a child under 7 years of age is supposed to be without discretion. The seven champions of Christendom were St. George of England, St. Dennis of France, St. James of Spain, St. Anthony of Italy, St. Andrew of Scotland, St. Patrick of Ireland, and St. David of Wales.

Solon the Athenian law-giver, Chilo the Spartan sage, Thales the philosopher of Miletus, Bias the Prienean, Cleobulus of Lindos, Pitacus of Mitylene, and Periander of Corinth, have for ages been known as the seven wise men of Greece.

Seven ancient wonders of the world are often spoken of, referring

to the *pyramids* of Egypt, the *hanging gardens* of Babylon, the *tomb of Mausolus*, the *temple of Diana* at Ephesus, the *colossus* of Rhodes, the *statue of Jupiter* by Phidias, and the *Pharos* of Alexandria. In more recent times the coliseum at Rome, the catcombs at Alexandria, the Chinese wall, the altars of Stonehenge, the leaning tower of Pisa, the porcelain tower at Nankin, and the mosque of St. Sophia at Constantinople have been called the seven wonders of the middle ages. In former times there were reckoned 7 sciences, Grammar, Logic, Rhetoric, Arithmetic, Geometry, Astronomy, and Music. The 7 hills of Rome were the Aventine, Capitoline, Esquiline, Cœlian, Viminal, Quirinal, and Palatine. The 7 Roman kings were Romulus, Numa Pompilius, Tullus Hostilius, Ancus Martius, Tarquinius Priscus, Servius Tullius, and Tarquinius Superbus. In England 7 kingdoms called Kent, Northumberland, East Anglia, Mercia, Essex, Sussex, and Wessex constituted the Saxon Heptarchy, before the time of Egbert.

The seventh son, and especially the seventh son of a seventh son, has long been popularly supposed to be endowed with wonderful powers of healing diseases by the touch, particularly on Good Friday. In France the seventh son without an intervening daughter is called a *Marcou*, and sometimes in Holy Week a genuine *Marcou* will have hundreds of patients to touch.

There is a curious Eastern legend of 7 sleepers who slept in a cave 187 years, a tale that perhaps suggested Rip Van Winkle, and to this day many Mahometans believe the names of the sleepers and their dog, posted on their doors, will keep away ghosts and demons.

There are several curious coincidences of the occurrence of the number 7 in nature. Seven eclipses is the greatest number possible in a year, and 70 in 18 years. There are seven bones in the neck of all mammals, there are 7 true ribs on a side, and 7 bones in the tarsus. The great ocean currents are 7 in number, and meteorologists describe 7 forms of clouds. There are seven symmetrical forms of crystals, 7 kinds of attraction described by philosophers, and 7 general properties of matter.

The 7 notes of the musical scale and the 7 tints of the rainbow suggest the idea of completeness. So also do the 7 recognized attributes of Deity, viz.: Wisdom, knowledge, goodness, power, justice, mercy, and truth, and the 7 relations of the Creator to man, viz.: Creator, Lawgiver, Benefactor, King, Judge, Saviour, and Father.

Ruskin has charmed the world by his pleiad-like grouping of the 7 Lamps of Architecture, and artists have told us that the foot of the renowned statue of Venus de Medicis is one-seventh the length of the statue.

The Budhists, who embrace over 150 millions of the human race, believe in 7 gods who rule the 7 days of the week. They say *Hiru* rules Sunday, *Kandu* Monday, *Angaharu* Tuesday, *Budahu* Wednesday, *Braspati* Thursday, *Sicura* Friday, and *Henaharu* Saturday.

Chaucer devotes a verse of the *Canterbury Tales* to a description of the 7 metals of the alchemists:

‘Sol gold is, and Luna silver threpe;
Mars yren, Mercurie quyksilver we clepe;
Saturnus leed, and Jubiter is tyn,
And Venus coper, by my fader kyn.’

The old column of the 7 dials in London faced 7 streets, radiating therefrom.

The partial constellation of the 7 stars has given the word *Septentrional*, to be seen in the treasury seal on every ‘greenback.’

Much interest has been taken by antiquarians to find the site of the ‘7 cities of Cibola,’ and the wonderful expedition of Coronado to find those Aztec or ante-Aztec wonders has recently been discussed in the publications of the Smithsonian Institute.

If the reader will make a note of the *sevens* as he peruses works on mythology, history, or science, he will soon be able to increase largely the collection presented in this hastily written article. Perhaps he will even observe that he is himself supposed to grow by *sevens*. At the age of 7 months the first teeth appear, to fall out in 7 years and give place to others; and that every 7 years appears to form a distinct week or period of his existence.

As Shakespeare has it, the players on the world’s stage have for their acts ‘seven ages.’

Mr. Hjalmar Hjort Boyeson, a contributor to the *Atlantic Monthly*, has been appointed Professor of the Scandinavian languages at Cornell University. It is urged that provision is necessary for the study of the Scandinavian languages in our American colleges for the Norwegians of Wisconsin and Minnesota. What is the professor’s name?