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A Certain Semite: The Path of Written Language from Him to Us

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1969
A CERTAIN SEMITE:
THE PATH OF WRITTEN LANGUAGE FROM HIM TO US

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by
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August, 1969
A CERTAIN SEMITE:

THE PATH OF WRITTEN LANGUAGE FROM HIM TO US

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PREFACE

A Certain Semite is not intended to be a history of handwriting, but rather a restriction to that part of the history and development of writing which has had either an indirect, or a direct effect on American writing. Although some authorities maintain that there can be no chronological order to the development of handwriting, it seems to me that there is a reasonably understandable order which can be followed in a reasonably discernible route from the Semite to us.

In researching the scholarship for a path to follow from him to us, I found that no work has dealt exclusively with this particular view of handwriting; therefore, it became necessary to sift extraneous materials from all the secondary sources used in this study that might lead onto other paths.

Naturally it was necessary to begin with the primitive cave man—he was a human being expressing himself in the only way he knew, and he did stand at the head of our path—and to follow later primitives as they advanced from pictographs, through ideographs and syllabic writing to the alphabets. From the Stone Age cave to the space-capsule cabin, writing followed a long path through numerous cultures.
recording many languages with letter-forms developed and designed to suit the character of the age and the people who used them.

In this study a chapter has been given to the most prominent of these people. Absorbed in their stories are other stories, for besides the movement of the hand across a writing surface, other aspects of writing naturally enter into the account of written language: materials on which and with which writing is executed; the alphabet with a systemized set of Phoenician symbols; the direction of lines which had to undergo experimentation of scribes on various surfaces before it settled in our left-to-right manner; capital letters, so perfectly proportioned by the Romans that they have endured side-by-side with other letters as they appeared, changed, and even vanished forever; the scribe's role as perpetuator of the records of mankind in his handwritten books; the Renaissance, which saw an adventuresome spirit enter into designs and styles of writing; and the advent of moveable block printing and invention of the typewriter, the latest phases of written communication.

At some unknown time the knowledge of the early development of writing was forgotten, but by the time of the period of colonization that followed the Pilgrims in the New World, a definite method of handwriting was used. Englishmen had found their own method of placing letters on paper and they took great pride in writing a beautiful hand.

They wrote many things: before anyone stepped off
the Mayflower, the Pilgrims drew up a document to which they signed their names; early Americans wrote letters, love letters and family communications to their people in the Old Country; they wrote business documents, including governmental agreements, shipping lists and many other commercial papers—all with a set of ABC's and a manner of writing that they probably knew nothing about except that they had inherited their knowledge from their immediate forebears.

Those who might have been curious and wondered about their means of communication, had to be content with the knowledge that their writing had come to them from the antiquity of early churches. Beyond that, the first Americans knew little and it remained for their descendants, two hundred years later through a new science called Anthropology, to learn about the ancients and their customs in various stages of civilization in all parts of the world.

The people of those earlier civilizations had left their records for all the world to see: accounts of successful hunts and military victories, religious works, myths and poems inscribed on rock or stone and various other surfaces. But unfortunately, ensuing generations had had to merely look at the pictures and symbols and guess at what they meant, until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when the keys to the lost languages were discovered. Mysteries of ages past were then revealed, paleographic secrets were understood, and vast stores of ancient literature and historical data
A Certain Semite is an effort to trace handwriting from him who was, according to discoveries made in the past hundred years, the first to conceive of the idea of writing, and also to touch upon pre-writing steps made by more barbaric peoples before him, without whom he would not have been able to give to the world his epic discovery.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>WRITING: &quot;ONLY YESTERDAY,&quot; COMPARED WITH SPEECH</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>WRITING: PICTURES PRECEDED IT</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>WRITING: SEARCHES MADE FOR THE KEY TO IT</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td>WRITING: THE PHOENICIANS HAD THE ABC'S OF IT</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
<td>WRITING: THE GREEKS HAD WORDS FOR IT</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI.</td>
<td>WRITING: THE IRISH LIGHTED IT WITH GOLD</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII.</td>
<td>WRITING: ENGLAND ABSORBED AND EMBELLISHED IT</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII.</td>
<td>WRITING: ARTIFACTS WERE VITAL TO IT: STICKS, STONES, BONES, RAGS, BAGS, AND BIRD FEATHER!</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX.</td>
<td>WRITING: WOOD BLOCKS AND COPPER PLATES ENHANCED IT</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X.</td>
<td>WRITING: TO PLYMOUTH ROCK AND BEYOND</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td></td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX</td>
<td></td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td></td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The Indo-European Family Tree</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Egyptian &quot;Ba&quot; and &quot;Thoth-Lunas&quot; with Pictographs</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Hieratic and Demotic - Developed from Hieroglyphics</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Cuneiform Tablet</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Ptolmey's Cartouche</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Cleopatra's Cartouche</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Celtic Illumination - The Book of Kells</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Beckman's &quot;Writing Masters&quot;</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>The Path of the Written Language From A Certain Semite to Us</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

WRITING: "ONLY YESTERDAY," COMPARED WITH SPEECH

The time at which the Semite first inscribed his writing on stone in the desert mountains seems to us a time of greatest antiquity, but writing began only yesterday in relation to man's whole history, for the Semitic invention is almost modern, compared with speech. And although we know nothing for sure about the development of speech, we can guess that it appeared at many places and at many times, starting when men first began to clan together and found that a more effective communication, than gestures and pantomime, was necessary.¹

The miracle happened, however, at some unknown time when primitive man discovered that he could make sounds by using air through vocal chords in his own throat.

These sounds, true, were merely used to cry out with pain, hunger, anger or ecstasy, but they were sounds, and little by little this furry creature in his dark world became skilled in the use of his voice. He imitated the sounds he heard about him--those of the birds and animals, the rush of wind, the roar of the waterfall--and this sound category

has been called by scientists the "bow-wow" stage.\(^2\) If man had not progressed beyond this speech stage, no progress in communication would have been made, for since time began dogs have barked the same bark, cats have meowed the same, lions have roared and donkeys have brayed the same, but man's sounds occur in almost countless variations!

Scientists have other theories that deal with man's sounds, such as those made in exclamations, "Oh, Ouch, and Ugh!" This is called the "ding-dong" theory.\(^3\) The "hey-nonney-nonney" theory is classified as man's natural outpourings such as the crooning of the mother to her child and the cries of her mate as he howled at the moon, or expressed his delight over the day's hunt.\(^4\) Another interesting theory is of "Yo-heave-ho," from the sounds that rose from grunts of physical exertion.\(^5\)

At times in history, some men believed that the Lord Himself gave language to man, intact, when He bestowed upon Adam the ability to name the animals in the Garden of Eden.\(^6\) As late as the seventeenth century, a Swedish philologist seriously argued that in the Garden of Eden, God spoke Swedish,


\(^{3}\text{Schlauch, p. 6.}\)

\(^{4}\text{Alexander, p. 9.}\)

\(^{5}\text{Ibid.}\)

Adam spoke Danish and the serpent spoke French. Gods also had something to do with writing, for there were scribe gods such as the Babylonian Nebo and the Egyptian Thoth, thought to be masters of man's destinies. And the Jews, of course, considered the text of the First Tablet of the Law to be given by God to Moses. Islam teaches, to this day, that Allah created the letters and communicated them to man. This mystical connection existed for a long time in men's minds, for early man believed that:

...language was employed with two closely associated functions: praying and invoking curses. Blessings were important too...for such spoken formulas represent an attempt to control nature through words. It was felt that if you expressed the desire, "send us rain," or "kill my enemy" or "may my child prosper" in the right way, the wished-for consummation would surely result.

The many languages of the world are now arranged into language groups, the one we are most concerned with being "Indo-European" because English belongs to that group, along with Spanish, French, German, Italian, Greek and a number of others.

Ages ago, about fourteen thousand years before Christ, the Indo-European people lived somewhere in Central Europe.

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8 Schlauch, p. 14.

9 Exodus 20:1-17.

10 Schlauch, p. 4.

and spoke this "parent" language. As these primitive people grew in number—they were hunters, nomadic herdsmen, and primitive farmers—they realized that they had to have other places to live, so at some prehistoric time, they spread over the continent taking the original language with them. They naturally had to overrun other countries and their languages blended with conquered people, so that the languages of both changed. Other changes came because of different geographic locations in which the Indo-European nomads settle, such countries as Italy, France, Greece, Russia and some countries in Asia Minor.

For several reasons the original language divided itself into various "branches" with English belonging to the Teutonic branch which descended from the "Germanic". The result is that the civilized world has been predominately Indo-European speaking. Except for the American Indian, all of the New World speaks it, and all the important European nations are descendants of Indo-European.

In the dim dawn of history, the Island of Britain was a place of sedgy water-meadows and matted thickets where men lived in the thinly wooded uplands on the chalk ridges of Kent or in Wilts, or in the moorland hills of Yorkshire or Cornwall. These men were wild tribes of the lowest grade of savagery, until the Celts came to the Island seven or eight centuries before Christ. Some of them had been with the hordes of Indo-European speaking people who invaded the European

12 Ibid.
The Indo-European Family Tree

- Aryan
- Hindu
- Sanskrit
- Armenian
- Albanian
- Latin (Romance Languages)
- Anglo-Saxon
- Old German
- Old Norse
- Irish
- Scottish
- Britannie
- Welsh
- Balto-Slavic
- Celtic
- Gothic
- German
- Dutch
- English

\[13\] Ibid.
continent, but they had crossed over into Britain. These Celtic people were called "Britons" and they blended with Gaelic inhabitants of the Island, who had come down from Ireland and the Scottish Highlands. The Gaels and early Britons combined into one group, spoke a common language, and came to be known as the "Celts."\textsuperscript{14}

Roman soldiers began trying to invade the Island before the first century, and Claudius finally conquered it in the year A.D. 43. The Roman conquerers ruled the Island for five hundred years, at the end of which they returned to Rome to defend it against other invaders from the North. They left great engineering projects, roads, and a small part of their language; of the three, language made the least impression on Britons, for although some Roman words remain even today, their language had very little effect on that of the early Englishmen, and none whatsoever on the writing.\textsuperscript{15}

The speech of Britain changed as the result of exposure to invasion of foreign tribes; it absorbed the language of Caledonians (called Picts) from the North, Scots from Scotland and the Saxons (Germans) from across the channel who spoke a variety of the original Indo-European language.\textsuperscript{16}

The New World was influenced by all the exploring and colonizing countries and North America, though dominantly English, could not help be effected by the various colorful

\begin{footnotes}
\item[15] "Language," 4254.
\item[16] Oman, p. 14.
\end{footnotes}
tongues to which it was subjected. Norwegian explorers come to this continent very early, the Indian waited for the settlers, Spaniards left a peppery verbal trail in their wake, and the French added their own individual style to the language of the New World.

It is hard to imagine language coming from its humble beginning and evolving through change, additions, and new creations into the mammoth collection of spoken language it has become.

It is also difficult to retreat from typewriters, printing presses, paper, pens, newspapers, magazines and books, back to the dirty, smoke-filled caves in remote European areas to find the beginnings of the written language, an occurrence of singular importance, and although:

...spoken speech may have been the divine spark that raised men above all other creatures, both the message and the law were subject to the will of the man who transmitted them, and nothing could guarantee the faithful preservation of the original uttered word. This goal was reached with the invention of writing. It alone has made possible the greatest cultures and philosophies; the great religions of the human race; it has been the mortar used by the founders and builders of empires; on it is based the history of science; it alone gave a powerful impetus to other branches of human knowledge, particularly to physics and natural science; not to forget the other countless benefits of civilizations which would never have existed without writing.17

17Doblhofer, pp. 13-14.
CHAPTER II

WRITING: PICTURES PRECEDED IT

The ancient world was not populated as we know it; there were only a few densely populated areas on any of the continents in the whole world. The story of our writing begins in one of these areas around the Mediterranean Sea where the center of life for every great culture in that small, ancient world grew up. Life had flourished there for a period of 600,000 years,\(^\text{18}\) probably because it was a warm climate in a world that had been unbearably cold; and it had water.

Not only did many of these countries border the Mediterranean but the other smaller bodies of water connected with it. In several of these countries there also flowed great rivers which made it possible for the inhabitants to grow products that they ate, wore and used.

In Sumer (present-day Irak) the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers overflowed periodically leaving layer after layer of tillable silt; in Egypt the River Nile wound its way through the fascinating land of Kings, leaving a similar accumulation of tillable soil for the inhabitants of that ancient land.

We have no written record of those early people beyond

a period of approximately 5000 B.C. in Sumer, and 3000 B.C. in Egypt, but the Sumerian (one of the Semitic people) wrote first, scratching his marks on clay tablets; the Egyptian wrote a little later using ink and brush on thin papyrus or his chisel on smooth stone. There had been other scribes before them, but their writing must be classified as "art" or simply "communication." Before the short biologically based history of man... intermittent written records only go back as far as the Semite and then trail off into the silence of the Stone Age Hunter's world.

Looking back from the twentieth century to the Stone Age man, we do not hear his voice or understand his art but we do know that, along with the use of fire, creation of stone implements and tools, primitive man did learn to communicate with others. Perhaps his message was in his pictures, the "writing" of ancient man all over the world. "Pictographs" (as these pictures are called) have been found on every continent, in caves, on rocks, on personal items--

19 Ibid.


clothing and weapons—even on pots and pans. 22

In France, Italy and Spain, the icy subterranean caves have yielded their harvests of pictographs made by Paleolithic man who drew animals which have not inhabited those countries in thousands of years: tiny primitive horses, bison, hairy mammoths, and the earliest reindeer. 23 Although it is argued that these pictures do not represent writing because they are not a part of a system of signs and could only be understood by the men who drew them, they were actually "stories without words" telling about situations that the Stone Age man was familiar with, perhaps communing with his god or with other creatures like himself. We will never know about those earliest works of art or writing, but at the basis of all writing and alphabetic symbols is the picture or pictograph.

The Indians of the North American continent also used pictographs, but oddly enough, the system of writing that finally reached the New World had to come through a period of 5000 years 24 and over a long circuitous route from the Cradle of Civilization at the Tigris and Euphrates, from the same beginning, pictographs!

When the barbarian painted his pictures on cave walls, he understood that they were symbols for those animals and familiar objects of the world he lived in. As time went by, however, and men settled in villages and towns to become

22Schlauch, p. 5.
23Gelb, p. 40.
24Ibid., p. 6.
something more than simple hunters and cave dwellers, this type of "writing" became inadequate. Man began to realize that life was more than concrete objects, for it was interwoven with emotions of love, friendship, and hate; temperatures of warmth and cold; experiences, as simple as finding something lying on the ground; and the personal processes such as walking, laughing and suffering.25

Non-picturable things, consequently, gradually developed into "ideograms," that is, pictures or symbols began to represent "generalized ideas."26 For instance, "sun" was drawn as a circle with marks to show sunrays, but the picture eventually came to also mean "warm, hot, bright or white" and, much later, also stood for "day." An old man leaning on a stick meant "man" in the beginning, but as time went by this same old man meant the idea of "age." The eye, in the beginning simply meant "eye" but the ideogram gave the idea also of "weeping," or just "seeing."27

Then as man became more civilized it became apparent to him that even the combination of pictograph and ideogram were not enough to satisfy his needs for communication; therefore, he invented "phonetic writing"28 which is not as complicated as it sounds. This was merely a system of pictures which brought to mind certain sounds; these sounds

25 Pei, p. 10.
26 Ibid.
27 Gelb, p. 106
were arranged in sentences to make a complete thought such as this:

I bee leaf I saw (a) woman

There is a game called "rebus" which is played according to the principles of "phonetic writing" and it is easy to see how ancient people could understand perfectly such sentences using "rebus writing." It was used by the early Egyptians for thousands of years until they could express themselves any way that they wished, to send messages, to keep business records and to write literature and history.29

Across the Red Sea, and into the great desert which was watered by the Tigris and Euphrates, the Sumerians had also arrived at "rebus writing," but they realized very quickly that it was an ungainly way to write because there were so many homonyms which made the phonetic system confusing. For instance, the picture of a bee could be used as a part of any number of words: belong, behave, behead, bewitch, befriend, etc., so one hot day a momentous thing happened. A certain Semite, who was perhaps disgusted with being bogged down with so many homonyms, got the bright idea

29 Ibid., p. 21.
of making a picture stand for a whole syllable instead of just one sound, and in this way he invented syllabic writing.\(^3\)

The idea caught on very quickly, for the desert people were business men who traded and made shipments up and down the rivers. Scribes set about making their "syllabaries" or lists of symbols that stood for syllables instead of whole words. And they made their symbols (which we do not understand) by using cuneiform or "nail-writing" on clay tablets which they used for business records.

The Sumerian writing owes its origin to the needs arising from public economy and administration. With the rise of productivity of the country, resulting from state controlled canalization and irrigation systems, the accumulated agricultural surplus made its way to the depots and granaries of the cities necessitating keeping accounts of goods coming to the cities as well as of manufactured products leaving for the country.\(^3\)

The Sumerian had a strange way, however, of expressing himself--he used only consonants. No vowels. In reading the writing of those people, one simply left out the "A, E, I, O, and U's" so that the vowel was simply thought but not written down; for instance, "Gntlnn prfr blnds" is not hard to figure out, even without vowels. It was an "explosive" language when read aloud, a mixture of sharp, gutteral sounds that would be strange to our Western ears, and it was of course, written the same way.\(^3\)

\(^3\)Doblhofer, p. 30.

\(^3\)Gelb, p. 62.

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 107.
One of the "exquisite little pictures" found in Egypt was of "Ba" the spirit which symbolized the survival of death. He was able to escape the tomb with his strong wings to lead the dead back to earth.

Thoth-lunus was the god of all learning and letters such as the pictographs and ideographs shown here.

Eye (I)  To weep  Sun
Walk  To Stride  To heat or to warm
Cool  To Find

33 Dobhalhofer, p. 78.
Back across the Red Sea, the Egyptians caught on to the idea of syllabic writing too, but they were loath to give up writing with their beautiful little pictures—hieroglyphs—and so they simply made their written language a combination of pictographic and syllabic writing (with numerous homonyms) which they understood, but which was vastly confusing to later generations. Their columns, temple walls, doorways, and monuments were covered with exquisite little pictures cut into hard surfaces. "Hieroglyphs" literally mean "priestly carvings" as they were written by the priestly class. The Egyptians held the priests in high esteem, and for a long time were content that they were the only ones who could read.34

Writing done in stone, however, had to be "incised" and it was slow, awkward and very public; therefore, the priests decided to invent a new writing known only by them, and seen only by them. The result was a "shorthand" copied from the stone hieroglyphs; they called this new writing "hieratic writing" which common people could not read. Some of the oldest papyrus rolls taken from mummy cases of 3500 years before Christ, are written in hieratic.35 The common people however, finally developed a writing which they could understand; it was called "demotic," which could be used by the masses.36

34 McMurry, p. 12.
Hieratic and Demotic, Derived from Hieroglyphics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hieroglyph</th>
<th>Hieratic</th>
<th>*Demotic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Demotic is used to this day.
In the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates there was a great deal of sand and clay and those clever people thought of a way to use clay tablets for writing; therefore, much is known of early Semitic writing because their clay tablets (shaped like bricks), literally thousands of them, stayed in perfect preservation, waiting for the science of Anthropology. 38

It is theorized that the Egyptians had, besides their stone surfaces, an even earlier writing material which must have perished before hieroglyphs, because their pictured characters were so completely developed with the rock inscriptions. 39 We know for sure that the two streamlined forms of writing (hieratic and demotic) were possible because of a writing material which was invented from a plant called papyrus which grew in the waters of the Nile. Without it we would know nothing of the early history of that country. But

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38 McMurtrie, p. 13.
39 Ibid., p. 35.
hieroglyphs were naturally difficult and impractical and consequently all three writings were completely forgotten the century before Cleopatra. Latin itself was partially derived from both these writings but when Rome overcame Egypt in the first century the meanings of the writings of the Egyptians had been long forgotten.\textsuperscript{40}

Cuneiform experienced the same fate as hieroglyphs; it was simply impractical, and it disappeared along with the meaning of its symbols, in the first centuries after Christianity.\textsuperscript{41}

And so, for hundreds of years, although writing developed, based on these systems, both Egyptian and Semitic writings were erased from the memory of man.

\textsuperscript{40}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{41}Ibid.
CHAPTER III

WRITING: SEARCHES WERE MADE FOR THE KEY TO IT

It is astonishing that for approximately 1800 years, the knowledge of the great Egyptian and Semitic writings should have remained an unfathomable mystery. During that time the Hebrews wrote down the Old and the New Testaments, Homer his Illiad and Odyssey, the classic era of Greece and other great cultures flourished and Rome with her Latin scriptures spread all over the world, but still the literature of ancient Egypt and Sumer remained a mystery.

Huge libraries of cuneiform tablets lay undeciphered, and Egyptian libraries of papyrus rolls which had survived such ancient catastrophies as the gutting of Alexandria (700,000 books vanished from the face of the earth when the Alexandrian library was destroyed) were still unreadable; both treasures simply waited for scholars persistent enough to break the secrets of centuries.

Shortly before the nineteenth century, scholars became more aware of fascinating marks made on the abundant clay tablets. In Persia (present-day Iran) an interesting

42 Canby, p. 81.

discovery was made which was to finally yield the secret of that strange writing. Near a little town called Behistun in West Persian mountains, a large carving was found in 1800 by Western archaeologists. A landmark to the natives, it was carved into a high mountain cliff at a location where it could be plainly seen five hundred feet above a natural resting spot on an ancient cavern route. An adventurous German, Georg Grotefend and later Englishman Henry C. Rawlinson, both Oriental historians, risked their lives to climb up the sheer cliff to copy the cuneiform story.44

The carving portrays Darius the Great, a famous Persian king of the fifth century before Christ, shown in a victorious pose after his triumph over a rebellious subject. A warning to other rebels, it was written in cuneiform in three languages (a magic number in unlocking both the ancient writings), Old Persian, Akkadian, and Elamite.45

The Persian version consists of 414 lines, the Akkadian consists of 112 lines, and Elamite of 263 lines, all telling the story in cuneiform.46 By 1846, Rawlinson had finished the decipherment of the three texts and unlocked the mystery of the stylized letters. Since that time several hundred thousand tablets have been studied, based on Sumerian cuneiform, and much information has been gained about the history

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46 Doblhofer, p. 120.
21

Cuneiform Script

Cuneiform letters punched into wet clay with a stylus. 47

47 Ibid.
Egyptian writing was also to be deciphered in that same time era. In 1798, Napoleon Bonaparte, in his campaign upon the British Indian colonies, got as far as the Nile River, but no farther. The armies were camped near a town called Rosetta, in the Nile Delta; it was near this town that Napoleon's bored soldiers found a strange, black basalt stone, soon to be called the "Rosetta Stone." It was unusual looking, and as was everything else in Egypt, it was covered with little drawings. This slab of stone, however, contained three (the magic number!) sections of writing. One of them was quickly recognized to be Greek, but the other two sections of writing unreadable.

Of course, for hundreds of years Egyptologists had been trying to decipher hieroglyphics. Thomas Young of England, one of the foremost Egyptologists, was given the job of interpreting the three texts. It seemed that it would be an easy task--so it was thought; one would simply compare the Greek to the other two writings and soon translate them! But not so. Young worked long without much progress. He did, however, discover a clue in the royal cartouches (they were the names of Royal personages enclosed in "frames") and his discovery enabled an eminent young French scholar to complete the decipherment.

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48 Kramer, p. vii.

49 Dobhlhofer, pp. 70-73.

50 Ibid.
This brilliant young professor was also an Egyptologist. Strangely, Jean Francois Champollion was a dark, slant-eyed, Oriental appearing child born to Caucasian parents, who had at a very early age, felt an irresistible urge to study everything about that ancient country. It seemed almost prophetic that such a one would solve the ancient languages written on the Rosetta Stone.51

The stone was inscribed in both Egyptian hieroglyphics and demotic symbols as well as in Greek letters. The demotic text was quickly solved, but the hieroglyphs remained a mystery until Jean Francois Champollion, refuting the opinions of other scientists—that the pictures were simply "pictographic"52—found that they were also phonetic and alphabetic. The Egyptians had not "trusted" their phonetic writing as did the Sumerians, and had continued to mix hieroglyphs and cursive writings all together, with new syllabic symbols. It was the Coptic sun symbol, "Re" that yielded the clue for both Young and Champollion; "Re" being the sign of royalty was included in all the royal cartouches.53

Not only was its decipherment important, but it was a historical document of no small importance, a decree passed by the priests of Memphis to honor Ptolemy Epiphanes of the second century B.C. for his efforts to improve the deplorable conditions existing in Egypt at that time. The decree declares

51 Ibid.
52 Kramer, p. 4.
53 Doblhofer, p. 72.
Ptolemy's Cartouche

The secret of the long dead Egyptian writing was found when Champollion was able to decipher this particular (stylized) Cartouche.

\[\text{Ibid., p. 68.}\]
that this resolution is to be inscribed on "hard stone in the sacred (hieroglyphs), the native (demotic) and in the Greek letters." 55

Of course, writing had continued during the hundreds of silent years, but now man had definite ideas as to how he came about the actual concept of writing and his relationship to the origins of the alphabet; he had found an enrichment in present life by knowing more about his ancient beginnings.

Both Young and Champollion worked with Cleopatra's cartouche. The "egg" at the lower right corner means that the royal personage represented in this cartouche was a female.

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56 Dobhlofer, p. 68.
CHAPTER IV

WRITING: THE PHOENICIANS HAD THE ABC'S OF IT

Civilization began to spread from the warm countries in the two millennia B.C., off the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, and accumulations of human beings appeared in the islands that dotted the waters from the desert countries to the rocky Greek mainland. Cyprus, very close to present-day Lebanon, was the first stepping stone; then Crete, a mighty civilization in the dim, obscure past, with a very usable system of writing (it remained undeciphered until the year 1952 when it was labeled "Linear B" by archaeologists); then the island of Rhodes, and Sicily and on to Corsica and the mainland.57

At that time there lived, on the shores of Lebanon and Syria in the land then known as "Phoenicia," a remnant of the "land of Caanan" a small nation of very energetic, zealous, bustling business men. They were relatives of the Hebrew, who had been pushed farther and farther from the center of their desert home until they found themselves backed up to the sea. They did not lament this fact, but set about making themselves the foremost commercial nation of the ancient world. Their most prominent cities were Tyre and Sidon, with great

57Canby, p. 159.
warehouses and workshops, for those were large seaports from which they sent merchant ships over the then-known world.\textsuperscript{58} Biblos was also a famous seaport, equally busy, but its fame lies in the fact that our Bible was named for that city. Tyre was famous as the center of dye-making in those days, specializing in the color of royal purple, used by all kings and queens.

The land of Phoenicia also produced glassware, metalware, pottery and building materials which those busy people set about loading on their ships, and trading with the city states all around the Aegean and Mediterranean, and even into the Adriatic Sea. Their ships would look quite frail to us, but they were a daring people and recent discoveries have indicated that they may have sailed over more of the world than was realized—into England for tin, and even South America in this hemisphere where Phoenician alphabetic writing was recently found.\textsuperscript{59}

We do not know exactly how or when their alphabet originated, but we do know that the Phoenicians were far too busy to care about the form and beauty of their letters. They would not have dreamed of taking an hour or so to incise a graceful letter onto a smooth rock, and certainly did not waste time to proclaim their own great deeds, or the glories of gods. As precision-minded businessmen, their only interest in writing was to keep records of their dealings.

We also know that somewhere in the heart of the Near

\textsuperscript{58}Thompson, p. 37.

\textsuperscript{59}Canby, p. 159.
Eastern civilizations, around the year 2000 B.C. an alphabet was invented. A certain Semite invented it; he was one of the many related Semitic people to which the Phoenicians belonged, and his phonetic system (meaning that it could be written and then spoken) used the smallest parts of words or syllables--these "smallest parts" being the first letter of the word or syllable.60

The Phoenicians were the first ones to use it and their "code" was the highest attainment of the human mind; without it there would have been no way of conveying thought or of recording facts, ideas and ideals on which man's intellectual and spiritual growth has come about.61 All art, religion, politics, commerce, language--all culture, was influenced by and indebted to the alphabet!

The story of our alphabet begins with its arrival in Greece where the Phoenicians traded in such city states as Corinth, Sparta, Athens, Thebes and others. Writing had been done in all the then-known world, but it had not been used with a consistent set of letters, an alphabet. So that we may place it at a certain time in history, we will begin with Homer, who wrote the Iliad and Odyssey.

Actually Homer "wrote" nothing. He composed. And his epic poems were recited orally generation after generation,


the source of all Grecian history and literature. But after the Trojan War (of the tenth century before Christ) and a period of literary darkness which followed, all his heroes were assigned to mythology, and even he, himself, was thought not to have ever existed. The science of archaeology in the mid-1800's, however, brought facts to light to prove that the blind poet really lived (probably in the tenth century)\(^62\), and used his genius to create tales of the earliest days of the highly advanced Aegean world.

Cadmus, a Phoenician hero, is thought to have brought the alphabet to the island of Thera even before Homer's time, but the arrival of the alphabet on the mainland of Greece occurred two hundred years after the life of the Poet Supreme in approximately 800 B.C.\(^63\) It was tossed about from one Grecian state to another, until the Ionian version became the dominant one, this being the area where Athens was located. It was the center of ancient Arts, and it flourished during the first "golden age" with Homer, enduring, in spite of constant conflict with other city states, to finally collapse (at the hands of the Spartans) in 404 B.C. But not before it had inspired the world with its second "golden age."\(^64\)

With the Phoenicians and their twenty-two letters, each with a long life history going back to a time before the

\(^62\)Canby, p. 158.

\(^63\)Ibid.

\(^64\)Thompson, p. 36.
pyramids were built, writing passed into the Western World. It is important to note that two of the Semitic people of the remote place and time had a more profound influence on our civilization than all those before or after them. The Phoenicians gave us the alphabet from which all written languages of Europe and America are based, and the Israelites gave the books of scriptures on which all Western religions are formed.  

The alphabet came into full flower during the last "golden age" of Grecian Literature and Arts; the awkward Phoenician letters developed into graceful symbols in Grecian hands after they had acquired Grecian names, and Grecian vowels had been added to the original purely consonantal alphabet.

The Semitic people not needing vowels spoke their explosive consonantal language; if they used vowels they merely thought them and did not write them. But the Greeks needed vowels; therefore, they took the weakest Phoenician consonants and made them serve as the familiar "A, E, I, O, U's" used by all Western civilizations.

The first letter, aleph, was a weak consonant unknown to Greek; the Greek simply omitted the consonant much as the cockney drops an h, thereby exposing the vowel sound, a, alpha. The Semitic he, lost the consonant h and received the value e, epsilon. Ayin might have become a, if aleph had not already become alpha; it received the value of

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66 Ibid.
The vowel ı, iota was developed from the Semitic yod. The vowel ı, was developed from the Semitic va'ā, a semi-vocalic consonant.

We write consonants and vowels in the same way as did the Greeks, an alphabet expressing corresponding sounds. This was the last step in the history of writing, for nothing new with the structural form of writing has happened since then. 68

All alphabets then developed, at various historical times in Europe and America and they are all directly or indirectly related to the Grecian set of letters. They flowed out of that country in several directions: to the Western world; to Asia Minor with its adaptations for the Lycian, Phrygians and others (Alexander carried a copy of Homer's works with him wherever he went in his military campaigns); to Africa where the Coptic alphabet developed from Grecian letters; to the Slavonic people with the Cyrillic alphabet which became the one used with all people of the Soviet Union; and to the Etruscans, a lost race who lived in northern Italy until 250 B.C. when they were overpowered by Rome, and whose written language has remained undeciphered to this day. 69

67 Ibid.
68 Gelb, p. 84.
CHAPTER V

WRITING: THE GREEKS HAD WORDS FOR IT

The "Glory that was Greece" was removed to Rome when she was overcome in the first century, but the conquerors were profoundly influenced by Classical Greece and the scholars who had been active even during the years of Roman siege. Such great scholars and writers as Ovid, Sophocles, Euriptides, Virgil, Plato, Aristotle, and many others had published their works through houses that employed scores of professional scribes. 70 Alexander had introduced schools of philology (handwriting) and established universities and pagan schools apart from the churches. Rome set about absorbing Hellenistic culture (another name for Grecian culture), acquiring sculpture, architecture, and literary works, and establishing Litterator schools similar to those of Alexander, for she preferred the beautiful letters and handwriting of the conquered country. 71

The situation was the same in Rome as it had been in Greece, an archaic handwriting had been used before they

70 Pinner, p. 52.

began using the alphabet. When Mount Vesuvius erupted in the year 79, and buried a Roman city called Pompeii, the event may have brought an abrupt end to that early writing development which has been discovered with anthropology. On the walls, and on wax tablets found in that unearthed city there have been found samples of an early Roman cursive writing which indicates that it was taught in schools, and may have been used by the Emperor Julius Caesar.\textsuperscript{72}

It is interesting to note that some of our own letter forms bear a resemblance to the "Old Roman Cursive: "a" was \( \alpha \), "x" was \( \chi \), "y" was \( \gamma \), and "z" was \( \zeta \). Other characteristics of this old cursive was the diminished size of the letters, and the "ascenders" and "descenders," which were apparently forgotten until later writing developments.\textsuperscript{73}

When handwriting was first widely used, everything was written with separated letters, probably because they were in the habit of "writing" on stone or metal. Variations of large letters were used in either rectangular or square capital letters. The first writings were called "lapidary scripts" because they were copied from the hard surfaces. In Rome the name was capitalis\quad quadrate, referring to their square capital letters first incised in perfect proportions on the Trajan Column in 114 A.D., in honor of the Emperor by that name. The column still stands today in the ruins of

\[\text{\textsuperscript{72}Tannenbaum, p. 7.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{73}Rene Etiemble, Orion, Book of the Written Word (New York: Orion Press, 1961), p. 31.}\]
These beautiful classic letters, however, did not lend themselves to rapid writing and even the earliest scribes desired a method of writing more swiftly; Biblical prophets had their own cursive writing; the Phoenicians, who wanted speed above all else, also had a careless cursive; and in Greece a "cursive quality" appeared in the Classical age when the pen and quill made writing on the new light mediums—parchment and vellum—easier. They discovered that rounded corners were more easily executed than square ones, so "uncial" writing came into being, the name given to them meaning "inch." The rounded writing was used in a rather crude state

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76 Thompson, p. 77.
before the fall of Greece to the Romans, but by the time of Christ, a handsome broad uncial was used as well as sloping uncial forms, the first real "handwriting." Jesus Christ may well have used uncial writing when he wrote in the sand in defense of the harlot; in fact, Christians quickly accepted the rounded letters as they thought the square capitals of the Romans to be pagan.

In Rome, in the fourth century, the square capitals gave way to a new capital, more easily written and called "Rustica," which was not "rustic" at all, but an elegant letter, taller and thinner than the earlier capitals which was used for all types of communication for approximately a hundred years. It was much easier to write but still had to be carefully executed with a square tipped pen held straight up and down between the first two fingers; and it still retained the appearance of a "capital script." The Aeneid, and St. Gall's copies of Virgil's works were rewritten at that time in "Rustica."

In the fifth century, "Rustica" was abandoned for improved uncial writing and was then used for emphasis (as we use italics today) but a taste of the convenient rapid

77Ullman, p. 50.
79Ullman, p. 4.
80Tannenbaum, p. 4.
writing had been a heacy thing for Roman writers, so the
"half-uncial" and the "minuscule" were developed.

Both of these letter designs were rapidly written small letters, "half-uncial" so-named because it indicated "half-inch" and was yet another capital script, except for its shrunken size; and "minuscule" which was the first budding of the small cursive letters we use.81

Some letter changes came about in the sixth century also with the small letters; for instance, the loop of the "a" was brought up to the top of the beginning back stroke: \( \alpha \), the "p" design of the "r" was given a little right arm: \( \rho \), and the "s" became an elongated letter with an ascending top: \( \phi \), which caused confusion with the similar "r" design. The "b" lost its upper loop and became "b" instead of: \( \beta \), and the "d" acquired a perpendicular stem: \( \delta \), the top of the "e" was closed and "l" became a tall ascending stem. "f" had not yet found its place and the "t" had not developed its cross at this time.82

It may be that these ascenders and descendes came about through carelessness and bad habit what with the mass production of books in both Greece and Rome for which huge numbers of scribes were employed. This venturesome spirit continued, however, and the large letters, used with

81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
minuscules were then dubbed "majuscules."\textsuperscript{83}

Try to imagine reading a line of writing without word divisions! This is the way it was in the beginning of the art of writing. There was no separation with the Greeks, or the writers before them, and very little word-division in Roman use.\textsuperscript{84}

The earliest books consisted of a number of lines of continuous writing in capital letters. There were seldom any divisions of the text—into paragraphs or chapters, or even one word from another.\textsuperscript{85}

The direction of writing varied too. The Egyptian had written "columnar" or in lines from right to left; the Semites had written in both directions; the Greeks liked \textit{boustrophedon} which means "ox turning" because they were reminded of the path of oxen as they plowed a furrow to the end, then turned to plow in the other direction. By the fifth century B.C., however, this method had yielded to that we use at the present, from left to right.

The widening world of the Roman demanded these more rapidly written scripts, for there were records, reports, orders, and much social writing to be done. And where the Roman soldier went, the missionary went; where the missionary went, he established schools and introduced writing to the rest of the expanding world, which included Ireland and England.

\textsuperscript{83}Thompson, p. 78. \textsuperscript{84}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{85}Fei, p. 356. \textsuperscript{86}\textit{Ibid.}
CHAPTER VI

WRITING: THE IRISH LIGHTED IT WITH GOLD

Ireland was a fair, green island that lay far from the upheavals of the European world, a land where millions of birds sang in the vast, uncleared forests and over the craggy cliffs. It seemed an unlikely place where learning would blossom, but when the Roman Empire collapsed toward the end of the fifth century, Roman culture collapsed too. Writing ceased abruptly and great schools were scattered by the conquering hordes of barbarians who swept into Europe. The craft, however, in Roman script styles, was sheltered in safe places such as the cloisters and monasteries of Ireland, the only country which was out of reach and immune to the barbarians.

There had been no schools in that country except Druidic schools, established by the Celts who took the island from its earliest inhabitants. In all other countries except Eire all early literature was written in Latin about Roman events and religion, but unlike England, Ireland was never a

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Roman province and she was able to preserve her oldest literature in the vernacular (native speech) written in Latin "letters." 89

There were "letters" before Christianity in early Ireland too; an alphabet called "ogham" a cryptographic (secret) script which was not really used for "writing" but for keeping accounts, calendars and for incising. 90 The Druids believed in the old, sacred custom of oral teaching and refused to set down their philosophy and teachings in "writings." 91

These strangely garbed members of the "literary caste" held audiences spellbound reciting poetry about the noble events from their own Celtic background. Within the literary caste were two important classes, the _file_, or poets who were keepers of the national tradition, and the _druids_, the teachers of philosophy and custom. 92 Their meeting places were in the open air of the hillsides, in the market places of their tiny villages, or on the sands of the shores. It was at such places of assemblage that they recited long genealogies and "imparted knowledge" to the common people, and the kings and chiefs as well. When missionaries arrived in Ireland they found people who knew discipline and were ready students although the "sacred custom of oral teaching was maintained

89 Blacam, p. 4.  
90 Ibid.  
91 Dillon, p. xvi.  
92 Blacam, p. 4.
for two centuries even after the Latin method of writing was taught, beginning during the latter part of the fourth century.

European monks crossed the dark waters in their long-boats or they took leave of the British Isles, fleeing north when they were no longer protected by Roman soldiers, to bring Christianity and learning to Ireland. The Britons did not accept their letters and religion but Christianity came to the Irish as a new ardour, and it was embraced with typical Irish passion. In the era that followed, secular writing (non-religious) and religious literature flourished side by side with Ireland's native speech preserved in the Latin alphabet.

Although Ireland was a singularly beautiful "island of woods, where the bird flocks of Eire came to bark in the sun," the earliest Irishmen spent much of their lives in warfare and in raiding neighboring territory which included the western coasts of Roman Britain.

Returning from one of these raids in the third century, they brought back a young, sixteen-year old boy who had been captured in Britain, the son of a minor Roman official in that country. This boy's name was Patrick. He was put to

93 Ibid., p. 5.


95 Dillon, p. xvi.

96 Blacam, p. 5.
work as a slave but sometime later managed to escape to France where he learned to read and write Latin, and where he also became a Christian monk in the Roman Church. Eventually Patrick returned to England and was reunited with his family, and while there he had a vision, or dream, that he should return to the pagan island and convert the very people who had stolen him from his boyhood home. This he did in the year 321 when he established his first monastery at Argham.97

The monasteries in St. Patrick's day were only little ecclesiastical settlements, small towns built around little wooden churches. Nevertheless, these settlements later became great centers of learning extending even out into the Hebrides, the Shetland Islands, and particularly to a bare, rocky island off the Scottish coast where later, 545, St. Columba established one of the most famous scribal schools on an island called Iona.98

St. Patrick was a poor scholar and his Latin was crude, but he was a remarkable bishop, who established 360 churches in Ireland during his thirty-year mission. His handwriting, learned at Auxerre, in France was "half-uncial" with the small and large letters used together; it was similar but more rounded than the Roman letters. With this handwriting he wrote his Confession, the first piece of true Irish writing. Other, better educated, missionaries followed him


98Placem, p. 8.
in Ireland and they used the half-uncial in the monasteries but as time went by—from the fifth to the ninth centuries—these monks, besides building more durable church buildings and establishing a well-organized religious system, also developed a true national Irish "hand." This hand had to be drawn carefully but it was based on the half-uncial brought from the continent and it enabled the scribes to write faster than they had done before. In the process of writing faster, they began to use "points" instead of the original rounded curves.99

This style of "hand" came to be known as "pointed writing" which resembled neither the rounded continental letters or the square Roman capitals. "It was a beautiful and precise writing and pointed the way to the 'minuscule,' a less ornamental and even more quickly written hand."100

The Irish monastic schools were founded mainly for the purpose of instructing "in the Lord's service" but children, as early as the fourth century, were accepted as pupils where they learned to read Latin, to chant, work arithmetic, read the sun dial, also to write. And monks, especially those of the Benedictine order were urged to learn writing and "preserve in the work of copying, a service most acceptable to God."101

99 Diringer, p. 170.
100 Ibid.
This "work of copying" was carried on in a special room in each monastery, set aside for that purpose. It was called the "scriptorium" where borrowed books were copied. Monks, especially those of the warmer climates found this pleasant work, but to the zealous, brown-frocked scribe monks who spent their days in the cold, unheated Irish scriptoriums, it probably meant suffering, for no candles could be used for light in the stone lined rooms, nor could they have fireplaces for warmth within the work area. The reason for this was that the manuscripts which were borrowed and copied were priceless, and the vellum or parchment on which they were written was extremely expensive. Therefore, they could risk no spark for warmth.102

The Irish scribes followed the routine of all other scriptoriums: several people were involved, with a sort of "overseer" who was called the Eperier who gave out materials (pen, ink, knives, awls and rulers) to the scribes. He also gave sheets of parchment, each of which he folded and arranged in the position for which it was to be used (in the form of a "codex," which was the early shape of the book as we know it). As no conversation was allowed--only gestures were used for communication--the scribe's job was a lonely one.103

He would set about his job however, ruling off margins, making guidelines so that there would be an imperceptible line


103 Ibid.
to follow, and then he would write with his black ink. When he finished four sheets, his text was proofread by a reader and then passed, without error, to the rubricator, a specialist who put in the titles, headlines, decorative border and versals (large ornamented letters) with colors made at the monastery. 104

The rubricator and the scribe produced what are known as "illuminated books" which were the speciality of the Irish; much of the fine literature of antiquity would be lost to us had it not been for the labor of these monks in northern Ireland. Theirs was a monumental labor; sometimes a single manuscript shows the aging of the scribe, who began a book in youth and continued writing it until his handwriting grew shaky with age. 105

After the scribe and rubricator were finished, their book was then ready for binding. As early as the Irish illuminated books, the sheets of parchment were fastened with leather strips passed through holes in the pages and then knotted at the back. But his method was improved and boards were eventually used—often covered with well-tanned leather—and fastened with metal clasps to hold the whole codex together.

The story of the ancient Celt has come down to us from the centers about the scribe, that consummate artist who copied, illustrated, and annotated the

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104Irwin, p. 76.

great stories of the people of Ireland and treasured up the lifeblood of long dead master spirits in great folio vellum manuscripts.107

Because of the many colors and the profuse use of gold in making these books, they must have had a singularly shining quality to people who lived in those dark days, especially in the darkness of the monasteries. For that reason they are called illuminated—lighted—by colors. The decoration centered around what we now call capital letters (they were called large letters or versals then) and the old Phoenician letters had come a long way from the crude ox head, fence post, and tent flap to become beautiful, creative designs.

The Book of Kells, the most famous of all the Irish illuminated books, is often called the most beautiful book in the world, so beautiful, in fact, that it "must have been written by the angels."108

...its ornamentation, which is almost incredibly delicate and ingenious, is for artists the supreme of ornaments in what is called the Celtic interlaced patterns.109

With The Book of Kells came a hint of the minuscule letter, although it was written in both uncials and half-uncials. It also used something, vaguely, which had not been used before, that is the occasional spacing between words. Written at the monastery of Kells, it survived, miraculously, the Norse invasions which came later and is now

107 Flacan, p. 13.
108 Hornung, p. 22.
109 Ibid.
Copies
May Not
Film
Well!
expounding use of a desiderio collocavit et quarelibus prucais laboris et domagis: rin doctrina seruiunt——

preserved at Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland.110

In the fifth century, after having been the cultural center of the world for several centuries, the Irish began to send out missionaries to the European continent (Roman culture had nearly vanished by that time, and many of the Arts were forgotten). Many of them found careers under Charlemagne who staffed his schools in the newly won Empire with the learned Irishmen. Clement who had been master of the palace school of that conqueror taught grammar and writing; Dicuil wrote on geography and at Pavia, Dungal wrote on eclipses. Poetry was written and taught by Druindmel. Johannes Erugiona was Master of the Palace School of Charles the Bald of France and Sedulius Scottus became a teacher in Liege. And from the island of Iona, went St. Columba to Bobbio in Italy where he had great influence on later writing developments.111

All these scholars taught and wrote with their exquisite Irish penmanship—the Irish point, half-uncial and the majuscule.

From the island of Iona, missionaries also crossed the narrow waters to teach the Picts of Scotland, and descended into Northumbria in England where there was a constant interchange of religion and education as well as warfare.

England had been occupied for nearly five hundred years at the time of St. Patrick, but in the year 43 A.D.,

110Ibid.

111Blacam, p. 45.
the Roman soldiers were called home to defend Rome itself, leaving the island defenseless. The natives, at the mercy of Scottish Picts and the Celts of Wales, asked the Anglo-Saxons and Jutes to come from their German homes and protect them. Instead, the three people occupied England, becoming the real "Englishmen" in the "land of the Angles."\textsuperscript{112}

By the seventh century, Irish missionaries had taught the Anglo-Saxons how to write the word of God, and thus it happened that the England of the north also learned the exquisite penmanship of the Irish.

\textbf{Early Irish Letters}\textsuperscript{113}

\begin{verbatim}
abcdeghnl
mnopqrstuvwxyz
\end{verbatim}

\textbf{Perfected Irish Script}\textsuperscript{114}

\begin{verbatim}
abcdfghil
mnopqrstuvwxyz
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{113} Tannenbaum, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
CHAPTER VII

WRITING: ENGLAND ABSORBED AND EMBELLISHED IT

When the Celts and the Anglo-Saxons came to the Island of Briton, they brought little with them besides their ships, and their swords and shields; they brought no books or means of making books, for writing was to them practically an unknown art. They were familiar with runic letters and could carve them, but no one ever thought of sitting down to write a book. They sang them. Minstrels are a part of the oldest knowledge of that island, minstrels who could sing long stories about the deeds of the older heroes of their race.115

There is a legend about the event that caused religion and learning to be brought the south of England: a young monk named Gregory happened to see some blond, blue-eyed boys being sold as slaves in the market place of Rome. He was told that they had been captured in a far-away northern island named Deira, which was one of the kingdoms of North England at that ancient time. Later when he became Pope he remembered the fair young boys and decided to establish missions on the islands that were inhabited by those blond,

blue-eyed people.\textsuperscript{116}

He chose a monk by the name of Augustine, who, with a little band of teachers and preachers went into the island in spring of 596 where they converted the king, Ethelbert, to Christianity, establishing a mission as time went by, at Canterbury. Writing in England began soon after the arrival of St. Augustine in Kent when some unknown scribe wrote out \textit{The Laws of Ethelbert} which is the earliest document written in the English language.\textsuperscript{117}

The north portion of England, a cold, densely wooded area, was made up of small warring kingdoms (one of which was Deira). It was to this area that missionaries had been sent from Ireland; Englishmen date the conversion of the North to the reign of Edwin, one of the northern kings, and his bishop Paulinus. Oswald, a later king, also influenced learning and religion in the North. He had been sheltered by St. Columba in the monastery at Iona during his youth where he learned to have the highest respect for his Irish teachers. When he became king he remembered them and sent back for them to come and teach at his mission at York. The monk, Aiden, was selected to direct that monastery. And in both the South and in the North, the English people used the Irish half-uncial, developing their own national handwriting and using both the pointed and rounded varieties (Eadfrith, the Bishop of

\footnote{\textsuperscript{116}Ibid.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{117}F. E. Harmon, \textit{Anglo-Saxon Writs} (Manchester, England: University of Manchester Press, 1952), p. 16.}
Lindisfarne, used the round uncial, and the Venerable Bede wrote with the pointed variety, both in the seventh century.\textsuperscript{118}

As the next three centuries passed, monasteries were founded in England by godly men, and from them emerged such talented monks as Caedmon who composed poems at the Whitby monastery atop the high cliffs of one of England's most ancient towns on the North Sea. This lowly servant in the monastery received his gift for making poems directly from God Himself, so the story is told, and although he never learned the art of writing, his poems were preserved by the educated monks who listened to them and wrote them down in the pointed handwriting they had inherited from the Irish.\textsuperscript{119}

The monasteries in England at that time were also, small meager centers; Caedmon and his fellow monks lived in old-fashioned, wooden, straw-thatched houses which resembled the shacks used from earliest times. But in the seventh century there came from Rome to North England a missionary, Benedict, who was not satisfied with the appearance of the monasteries. He had been accustomed to better surroundings and was not content with the shabby, wooden structures, so he set about building his monastery (at Wearmouth) of stone; furthermore he had windows made of glass--an almost unheard of luxury in those days! Besides these innovations, he also placed pictures on the walls and established the first English

\textsuperscript{118}Krapp, p. 36.

\textsuperscript{119}Harmon, p. 19.
library of several hundred volumes. 120

At Wearmouth there was a young altar boy by the name of Bede— it was the only name given to him at birth— who spent his whole life in the peace and quiet of St. Benedict's monastery where he studied from the books of that great library. He learned to write in the pointed uncial forms of the Irish hand and later taught this handwriting to his numerous pupils. His handwritten books were numerous and they were circulated all over the European continent. Not only did Bede write Latin works, but he translated Latin works into Anglo-Saxon; in fact, he was writing the Gospel of St. John into Anglo-Saxon on his death bed. 121

In the very year of the death of the Venerable Bede (735) there was born in England another person who was to become very important to the story of writing. This was Alcuin (Al-kwin) who grew up to become a monk at York where he learned to write the Irish Uncial hand. During his lifetime he saw fighting and feuding between the ruling families of England, until in desperation he would periodically leave the country to travel in Europe. On one tour he had the good fortune of meeting Carl the Great, or Charlemagne, in Rome. Charlemagne had been busily conquering most of Europe and became the Holy Roman Emperor, Ruler of all Frankish Lands. 122

120 Ibid., p. 20.

121 Ibid., p. 21.

This new ruler dreamed of unifying Europe, for it had been in chaos and confusion since the fall of Rome. Some order was beginning to appear with a slow rebirth of culture during the Middle Ages when the practice of writing and the knowledge of the alphabet began to emerge from the cloisters. "National hands" had begun to develop in every country such as that of the Ostrogoths, Visigoths, Lombards, Franks, and the Anglo-Irish Insular hand which was considered the most beautiful and influential of them all. No matter what tendencies the various writings had, they were still all derived from the Roman scripts.\(^{123}\)

Charlemagne observed that all national hands were difficult to read because scribes had been careless in the cloisters, or they had been poorly trained, and individual scribes had used unreadable abbreviations. To make things even worse, a scribe by the name of Tiro, secretary to Cicero in Rome, had invented a sort of shorthand called "Tironic notes."\(^{124}\) Consequently many errors had been made in copying the scriptures and Charlemagne determined to remedy this situation. His solution was to establish a standard handwriting throughout Western Europe, and to correct all the mistakes that had been made in copying the Bible.\(^{125}\)

\(^{123}\) Nesbitt, p. 28.


\(^{125}\) Nesbitt, p. 28.
Although Charlemagne, himself, never learned to write, he was a genius at organization and he knew that his first step was to create this standard handwriting. He remembered Alcuin, who had the reputation of being the foremost Bible scholar in Europe and who also knew how to write the beautiful Irish hand. The new ruler sent for Alcuin at York to come to Aachen in France as head of the Palace school and to advise him about books and letters. The monk then worked with some of the most outstanding scholars of Europe in inventing a standard hand for this unusual task.126

At York, in England, Alcuin had seen a number of new developments in handwriting as he worked and taught in the monastery there. Back in his earliest years, of course, Irish pointed writing had held sway, but there had been a tendency to shorten and to join letters whether they were written pointed or rounded. This "joining" first began with "ligatures," that is, the joining of only one or two letters in words such as had been used to a small degree in the writing of The Book of Kells (one of the commonest ligatures was made with "e" and "t" the design which eventually developed into the ampersand: \&). And with the joining of more letters and the use of both small and large letters together handwriting began to take on a distinctive "cursive" appearance.127

Alcuin, naturally, had all these things in mind when he went to France, although in his travels he had also observed

126 Ibid. 127 Nesbitt, p. 29.
the handwriting of other countries. At that time the French
were using an attractive clear small letter and there were
other designs that Alcuin and his colleagues studied and
refined. Finally they worked out what was called the "Caro-
lingian minuscule" (meaning "Charlemagne's small letter")
which was a cross between half-uncials (short capitals) and
cursive (running, joined writing). This was the first real
minuscule (small letter) to be written instead of printed
painstakingly, as the old scribes had done.128

After the new minuscule was developed and approved by
Charlemagne, a decree was issued by him in the year 789 that
all existing literature, legal codes, ecclesiastical services,
the Gospels, everything was ordered to be rewritten in the
standard hand. Although he cannot be given all the credit
for Carolingian handwriting, the Englishman, Alcuin, unques-
tionably had great influence on it. Actually it kept on
developing, changing and becoming more perfect from its
first introduction until long after the death of both Alcuin
and Charlemagne.129 But ironically, the new Carolingian writ-
ing was not accepted in Alcuin's home, the British Isles, until
much later.130

At the time that Europe was enjoying the standard hand-
writing in the relative peace of the Continent, England was U

128 Ibid.
129 Nesbitt, p. 29.
130 Diringer, p. 173.
forced into warfare once more in combating invasions made by the Norsemen. Fortunately, for that country, a very wise man took the throne in 871 and it is no exaggeration to say that King Alfred revived learning in England when it was almost extinct. 131

Bede and Alcuin and other early Englishmen of culture had long been dead when he came to the throne, and he complained that few of his countrymen could read and write, saying, "So clean fallen away was learning in the Angle race that there were very few on this side of the Humber who would know how to render their service book into English or to read off an epistle out of Latin into English. . . so few of them were there that I cannot think of so much as a single one south of the Thames when I took the realm." 132

Alfred compiled the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle so that there would be a record of Anglo-Saxon England as he knew it. He recalled that when he was young before Wessex fell to the ravages of the Danes that the churches had been full of fine libraries, and although the clergy had been numerous they profited little by the books since they could not understand Latin. All books, of course, were written in Latin at that time. 133 He also hearkened back to the days when his forefathers had occupied the Island, a time when they knew only runic letters (the Futhark) with which to write.

131 Oman, p. 43.
132 Irwin, pp. 74-75.
133 Hornung, p. 19.
Although the Futhark has no direct influence on the development of handwriting, two of its signs were retained for hundreds of years: the "wen" (used for the sound "w") and the "thorn" (representing the "dh" sound). The "wen" was dropped when the French needed the sound for their "double u" but the "thorn" has been used sporadically all through the centuries.\textsuperscript{134}

The original symbol for the thorn was the "d"; the uncial "d" which reached King Alfred was written \textsuperscript{135}\textsuperscript{135} , and he changed it, crossing the ascender as we do the "t": \textsuperscript{135}\textsuperscript{135} . Just before printing was invented, the barred "d" was changed to the symbol, \textsuperscript{135}\textsuperscript{135} , and the regular "y" was dotted so that one could discriminate between them. This caused confusion in the use of such words as "the" (Ye) "there" (Yr) and "those, this" (Ys) so that it was ultimately returned to its original shape.\textsuperscript{135}

The reign of Alfred was a single spark of light in a dark age, for the tenth century was the very depth of the Dark Ages, when the wisest thought the end of things was near and when strong men quaked with dread at the sign of any unusual occurrence—an eclipse, comet or even the sound of strong winds.\textsuperscript{136} It was a time of utter hopelessness and Alfred was determined to dispel that hopelessness by making learning available to the Youth. He established schools—

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{134} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{135} Hornung, p. 22.
  \item \textsuperscript{136} Krapp, p. 83.
\end{itemize}
the first being the "Great School" at his capital in Winchester, a school that was not for royal children alone, but also for the sons of plain ordinary people.\footnote{137}{Ibid., p. 84.}

He, himself, had two scholars follow him all through his busy days, reading aloud such works as Bede's \textit{Ecclesiastical History of England}, Orosius's \textit{History of the World} and Pope Gregory's \textit{Pastoral Care}, works which he then had translated from Latin into Anglo-Saxon. Nevertheless much literature disappeared in the devastating invasions of the Danes and, "Schools and monasteries were plundered; books were destroyed or lost on an appalling scale. . ."\footnote{138}{Blacam, p. 5.}

Alfred spent most of his life fighting the Danes, and was finally forced to give up a part of Northumbria, called "Danelaw," but warfare continued for the next century so that from the time of his death, to the Conquest in 1066 writing was kept alive either in a great flight to the Continent of all learned scholars, or in retreats with the English monks to their in-land cloisters.\footnote{139}{Harmon, p. 32.}

One of the most famous early works to emerge from England was one similar to \textit{The Book of Kells} called the \textit{Lindesfarne Gospels}, another beautifully illuminated book which is cherished as one of the world's treasures. It was written in the rounded uncial letters before the pointed writing of the Island became dominant. The pointed, faster
writing of the English differed from the Irish "hand" in that it was more pointed, so much so that it was called "prickely" writing. Until the Normans came in the eleventh century, this prickely writing was used and would probably have been used indefinitely if the French had not forced the English to accept their famous minuscule.

After the first shock of the Norman conquest, there was "Normanizing" of all English traditions and an intermingling of Norman and English arts--among them, writing. Calligraphers came from the Continent to teach handwriting and while the English accepted their styles, they also maintained native tradition, which produced a curious combination of the beautiful Caroline minuscule with the Anglo-Saxon angular letters. And by the end of the eleventh century there was an inclination with all Europeans to angular letters.

As satisfactory as the Carolingian minuscule had been, there was a restlessness for a change, and a turning away from the perfected minuscule writing began. And after a century of casting about for a more appealing writing, scribes finally arrived at a new style at the beginning of the thirteenth century which not only fulfilled an esthetic need but could be used economically. This was important, for vellum and parchment were frightfully expensive and the new writing design required a great deal less space on the page than did

140 Ullman, p. 78.

141 Ibid.

142 Diringer, pp. 247-248.
the rounded Carolingian writing.\textsuperscript{143}

It is a peculiar fact that writing followed the trend of design, and this was a period of religious fervor in which people were superstitious and felt an extreme dependence upon God. Therefore, they made their columns and spires abnormally tall, an expression of uplifting to heaven, using much embellishment and rococo decoration. Their writing design showed a kinship to their architecture, especially in the lifting and "breaking" of their arches.\textsuperscript{144}

Gothic was "broken" and then "mended" with an upward stroke. In this manner the perpendicular lines of all letters were moved closer together and much more could be written on the page. It was economical, but it was sometimes difficult to read, as the dark strokes were quite close together.\textsuperscript{145}

A page of Gothic writing had a distinct "textured" look and was given the nickname, "Textura;" in fact, Gothic had several nicknames, "Black letter," "Fractura," and much later "Old English," which is still identified with England, although only in Germany has "Black letter" been used as the national hand down through the centuries.\textsuperscript{146} It seems appropriate that Gothic would appeal to these countries, particularly, since the broken-round writing probably resembled the English prickly writing; and something of the stiff,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{143}Ibid.  \\
\textsuperscript{144}UNESCO, p. G.  \\
\textsuperscript{145}Hornung, p. 33.  \\
\textsuperscript{146}Ibid. 
\end{flushright}
precise, bold characteristics of "Black letter" fit the national spirit of Germany.

For a period of three hundred years, however, it was extremely popular with all countries and some interesting developments occurred with the letters themselves during this period: abbreviations were increased enormously, ligatures became common, the long-tailed "s" which resembles our printed "f" was introduced for use in the middle of the word (it had never been used except at the end of words before) "u's" and "v's" were separated (they had both been used as "v's" before, serving the same pronunciation) "i's" acquired dots and the uncial "c" and "r" attained permanent shapes. Important, too, was that during Gothic times the consistent use of capital letters began, with majuscules and miniscules used in combination as we use them today. 147

If some capitals had not been mixed with "textured" small letters there would have been a dreadful monotony in the appearance of a page of writing. As it happened, however, the capitals most commonly used with Gothic writing were the rounded Roman capitals or some other rounded design which relieved the monotony of the solid appearance of the writing.

Naturally, a faster written cursive soon developed; writing came out of the churches and became much more widespread with innumerable professional, and even itinerant scribes roaming about the country plying their trade. In

147 Ullman, p. 135.
Typical Gothic alphabets showing "broken rounds" and "stiff" characteristics, which, nevertheless, lent themselves to ornamentation. Gothic is used, to this day, as the national hand in Germany although it is invariably termed "Old English," in this country.\(^{148}\)

England the hurriedly written, informal (free) hand was called "court hand" and was used for business and social purposes as well as by clerks in courts. The formal (set) Gothic was called "text hand" which was used for all formal purposes and was taught by writing masters. By the fourteenth century, every country of Europe was using a variety of "court hand" and it was given the inelegant name of "bastard script" because it developed out of the combination of text and court hands. Cursive—running writing—leaned a little to the right, the letters "b, d, h, and l" acquired loops at the top and a cross bar was moved to the top of the "t" stem (it had rested at the bottom until that time). And for the first time, cursive writing was a reality, that is, writing was executed without lifting the pen from the paper to make each letter. 149

All these developments were important because of the effect they had on present-day handwriting; probably the most important circumstance was that Gothic letters were perpetuated as the first letter design used by German, Johann Gutenberg, for printing with his new invention of movable type. In England, William Caxton gave his country the Gothic cursive called "lettre Batarde," meaning a "running hand." 150

By the fifteenth century, men again began to feel restlessness for a change; tied, as they had been to a church-centered world, they desired a more "man-centered" humanized way of life. They were weary of broken-arch architecture and

149 Hornung, p. 34.

150 Nesbitt, p. 63.
of the stiff perpendicular letters patterned after Gothic design.

A great search for new ideas was made by scholars and scribes, and in their search they turned to early Roman and Greek literature, rediscovering works of art and literature. But, unaware, they made the discovery of this literature as it was written in the Carolingian minuscule, which had of course, been copied by Charlemagne's scribes beginning in 740 A.D. Mistaking the Caroline writing for actual Roman and Greek manuscripts, they pounced upon the lovely, rounded writing, accepting it as the genuine style of earlier civilizations and dubbed it "antiqua," and "lettera antiqua," and even more often as Roman writing. Once again the Carolingian trend swept Europe and schools were established for scribes to teach the "antique" writing,\textsuperscript{151} for:

...humanistic writings were among the finest ever produced. They were completely different from those of the vanishing Medieval period; they had an impressive clearness and precision about their pages; ornament was used sparingly and tastefully; the entire aesthetic effect was often achieved simply through the elegant lettering arranged neatly in lines that were placed on the page as to make a delicate overall tone.\textsuperscript{152}

This was far different from the Gothic that had loaded a page with "picket fence" letters! It was at this time—the fifteenth century—that scholars scornfully applied the name "Gothic" to the letters of the past several hundred years, meaning that they were crude and barbaric.

\textsuperscript{151}Ibid., pp. 66-67.

\textsuperscript{152}Ibid.
along with the architectural designs which had inspired them.  

At the very time of the rejection of "broken" rounded writing, another event of singular importance took place; the discovery, by Columbus, of the New World, an event which came late in the continuum of steps leading to handwriting in America.

The English were showing imagination with their endless varieties of writing, trying to out-do each other with fancy additions such as long tapering strokes, angular lines where there should have been curves, letters leaning to the left, decoration of capital letters and placement of "spurs" on small letters. In the year 1571 the first book on handwriting in English was produced and entitled A Book Containing Diverse Sortes of Handes, which was used by Elizabeth I and her subjects. A Secretary hand became very popular for the common writer--the word "secretary" meaning "whatever might be the popular variety at the moment."  

The Renaissance writers had "bad habits" and the great Bard was no exception.

William Shakespeare's careless errors in handwriting his plays included: the use of the minuscule "a" as an abbreviation for "and,"; the distortion of descenders--this one habit gained him the reputation of a "bad penman"--; the loops of his "b's" were written so that they were mistaken for "l's" (this caused confusion in reading his will); he never dotted, or used any mark over his "i's"; he used a large

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153 Ibid.

154 Tannenbaum, p. 24.
assortment of "k's" and they all looked like "b's"; his "l's" instead of being made with full loops were made in a narrow, triangular loop; and he wrote his "m's" in this manner: 

Despite carelessness, however, and the maze of styles that came and went, two lasting "hands" finally emerged that lent themselves to the natural tendencies of the writer's hand. In Italy the resurrected Carolingian letters were leaned to the right and called "Cancelleresca" (Cervantes told the story of his picaresque hero; Petrarch's beautiful writing was Cancelleresca and Aldus Manutius recopied Virgil's works in this hand). Henry VII was familiar with the lovely rounded writing and Shakespeare referred to the Italian writing as the "Sweet Roman hand," but it was used in England only to a limited degree by educated men until the sixteenth century. They called it "italic" and it has lasted until our time, being used in various ways.

The court hand of England was fused, finally, with rounded Italic and with strong influence from the French, there developed from that combination, the "roundhand" which was peculiar to England; it was familiar to Queen Elizabeth and King James, but it did not come into its own until the time of Cromwell when England became the foremost commercial nation; roundhand then became the standard business hand used and was

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155 Ibid., pp. 24-25.

156 Nesbitt, p. 144.
copied by other nations with whom the English traded.\textsuperscript{157}

Printing had begun in an era just preceding the discovery of America at a time when books were scattered thinly over the European continent and most of the world was illiterate. But after printing, came books; among them were copybooks which were printed and used for instruction in teaching writing. George Shelley’s handbook called \textit{Natural Writing} (1709) became the pattern for English writing masters and Englishmen developed great virtuosity in the technique of flourishing and in the use of roundhand.\textsuperscript{158}

Invariably the penman’s copy book contained a page of Roman capitals reflecting the influence of the Renaissance with its enthusiasm for all things classic. Along with this page there constantly appeared the various designs of the "Cancelleresca" a development of the humanistic cursive. Following these designs there was a page of Cancelleresca capitals, which were called initials. The ampersand was introduced in the first copy books. Not neglecting anyone, the copy-book writer included pages of legal, or mercantile hands which were influenced by the cursive or Gothic hands, a set of corresponding "initials" to be used with it called "majuscule mercantile.\textsuperscript{159}

Writing and type design took their separate ways, of course, and the practices of handwriting books declined until the scribes were forced to become teachers, or to find other employment, and at the beginning of the 1700’s manuscript books were abandoned and the practice of personal, everyday

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{157} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{158} Ibid., p. 115.
\item \textsuperscript{159} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
handwriting became widespread for other purposes. Roundhand served as a basis for "calligraphy" (beautiful handwriting) and penmanship, both of which were possible through the use of the pointed steel pen. Roundhand was legible, neat in appearance, and above all, more swiftly written than any of the hands used in Europe; even such practical men of affairs as Samuel Pepys became interested in beautiful writing. Prominent calligraphers and engravers were of great influence on Englishmen through their letter designs. Prominent among eighteenth century penmen was George Bickman whose virtuosity is shown on the following page. He uses three distinct writing styles which we have been discussing: the broken arch (written with much flourish, for Gothic lent itself to Ornamentation) the simple Roman capitals, and round-hand small letters and capitals. The long "s" design was used for a long time in England and even in America where Benjamin Franklin was very fond of it for his engravings.

160 Ibid. 161 Bickman, p. 25.
The

Writing Master's

Invitation, and Instruction.

Come Youth, the charming sight behold,
With laurel plumed a pen of gold.
If you would win this glorious prize,
Do as your master shall advise.
Tell you from learner, master gone,
Make both the lays your gold your own.

Come, listen youth, and I'll display
To this rare art a certain way.
He that in writing would improve,
Must first with writing fall in love.
For true love for true pains will call,
And that's the charm that conquer's all.

Three things bear mighty sway with men,
The sword, the scepter, and the pen,
Who can the least of these command,
In the first rank of fame will stand.

162. ibid., p. 20.
William Caslon, basically a printer, was also an important letter designer and wherever expansion and colonization of the British Empire went, Caslon's letters also went. His alphabet was the first to arrive and to be used in American printing, and it was also used during the Industrial Revolution both here and in other parts of the world. People, learning to write, used the best copper plates, Caslon's, from which they learned their letters in copy books. 163

163 Hornung, p. 56.
CHAPTER VIII

WRITING: ARTIFACTS WERE VITAL TO IT:
STICKS, STONES, BONES; RAGS,
BAGS, AND BIRD FEATHER!

In its route as it has almost reached the shores of the New World, handwriting has changed many times in form, and has become easier as it developed over the centuries. The main reason for this was the change in materials, for the urge to write faster made man search unceasingly for smoother surfaces and more effective instruments that he could use more easily for creating letters.

The earliest barbarian lighted his way into the underground caves with smoky torches and drew pictures on smooth stone walls. How he reached the high levels of the walls, or what he used to apply the colors he gave his bison, antelope, horses and other creatures, we will never know. The smooth surface of stone, however, was a perfect surface for his pictures, as it was to be centuries later for Egyptian priests who carved their picture writing on stone surfaces with chisels and knives.

In Sumeria, the Semites used clay for everything! They built their houses and temples, as well as shelters and fences for animals with clay. Business men used tablets of
clay to keep their business accounts, and the schoolmaster used a large, smooth slab of clay as his "black-board" to teach by. Early Sumerians who wrote a rounded, stylized form of letters, used an instrument that resembled an ordinary nail; thus their writing was called—"nail writing." Later when their letters became even more stylized, they switched to a stylus (similar to a stiletto), a long, narrow, metal or wooden instrument with a wedge-shaped end that enabled them to make their strange looking letters or "cuneus." The Latin word "cuneus" means "wedge" and therefore, "wedge-form writing" is known as "cuneiform" writing. One can see by looking at such writing that the letters were not really "written" on the wet clay but were "punched" into tablets of clay by school boys and others who could write. When one wished to keep a clay letter, or when school boys finished their day's lessons on clay tablets (which resemble our building bricks) the bricks were taken to an oven where the lesson, or letter was baked and preserved.

In Egypt, the first surface to be used for writing was also smooth stone, but papyrus was invented by the Egyptians about 5000 B.C.; a material similar to paper, it was made from a reed (plant) which grew on the banks of the Nile River and it was perfectly suited to the swifter forms of writing that became necessary to the common people. Pliny the Elder, says the process of making papyrus was complicated and difficult.

164 Doblhofer, p. 88.

165 Tannenbaum, p. 49.
and even impractical, for when it was thin it could be broken
by a heavy stroke of a pen, and when it dried it was as brittle
as dead leaves. Yet it survived as a writing surface until
the eighth century and was not discontinued entirely in desert
climates until the second century of our era. Egyptians
used the pith of the plant, cutting it into thin strips and
laying the strips crosswise in layers. They were then glued
together and weighted until the layers adhered; then they were
pounded and polished with a round stone until smooth. The
papermaker then glued long sheets together until he had
a roll long enough for a papyrus "book." These books called "scrolls" have been found where
they have been buried in desert sand for thousands of years;

166 Pinner, p. 12.
167 Lionel Casson, et. al., Ancient Egypt (New York:
some were used for wrapping corpses, and others put into graves in accordance with the age-old custom of burying the dead with their favorite books. When they were not in use they were rolled up and stored in stoneware jars; a library of them consisted of a number of shelves where these jars were placed. And there were no indexes or arrangements to serve as guides to finding what the scroll was about, except for a label which hung on a string attached to the stick on which the papyrus was rolled. These labels which hung on the outside of the jars were designed to indicate the reading matter on the scroll. One of the most common was a leaf, indicating that the story was about trees or forests, or a label made in the shape of a cowl (head coverings for monks) indicated that the book dealt with churches or monasteries.\footnote{Ries, p. 240.}

The papyrus reed grew almost solely in Egypt during the Classical period (and before) and was exported to other countries. The Arabs on their voyage of conquest in the eighth century introduced it into Sicily where it still grows.\footnote{Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, The Life of the Book (New York: Abelard-Schuman, Ltd., 1957), p. 57.}
Eumenes II to have his people experiment to find another writing material as a substitute for papyrus. The skins of animals were the most readily available materials and they were put to use for writing purposes as early as the second century B.C. They were crudely prepared—treated to rid them of fat, hair and wool, pounded for softening, then stretched on a frame and scraped with pumice or chalk until smooth and thin. But parchment and vellum were heavy and although they were both long lasting, they were never as popular in the ancient world as papyrus. "Parchment" is the French name given to the material made from sheep and goat skins, while "vellum" was the skin of calves. A very choice variety of vellum called "uterine-vellum" was made of the hide of unborn calves, and used only for very important documents.

The manufacture of parchment took longer than that of papyrus and it was expensive, so there were fewer parchment books. Practical people often removed older writings and used the sheets over and over again. Some of the most ancient literature has been lost to civilization because writing was scraped from heavy parchment this way, and later books written over the original writing.

The transition from scroll to book was gradual, extending over several hundred years to the fourth century during the Middle Ages. The first ones were similar to early American slates, with raised wooden margins around a flat

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170 Ries, p. 247.

171 Lehman-Haupt, p. 54.
piece of wood; this was covered with black wax and written on with a stylus—a sharp stick with a little spatula end that could be used to "erase" a mistake. The "mistake" was melted with a candle, so that the writer could start anew, smoothing the soft wax with the spatula end. Two of these tablets were attached at the edges and folded together so that the written message on the wax was protected; naturally, this had the look of a book, or "codex." For more formal occasions, the wax sheet was replaced by white ivory--this was the original "diploma" used in the Roman Senate. Eventually parchment leaves were used within backs of wood; they folded more easily than papyrus sheets and were not ungainly as was the scroll like the one illustrated, which had to be held with one hand and unrolled with the other as the reader read. Heavy wooden backs eventually replaced the lighter ones—they were usually made of seasoned oak and were ideal for decorating with gold and jewels (to exalt the early Christian scriptures). The wooden covers and leaves of parchment placed inside were finally bound together by leather thongs and came to have the appearance of a book. Later the

172Irwin, p. 66.
book covers were made of calf skin and then of vellum and parchment—all of them profusely decorated.

Parchment was ideal for the "codex" shape of books for it was too heavy to roll into scrolls. The ancients only used it for hard wear—this included use in schools, for use when traveling and for keeping permanent records. Most people were prejudiced against the clumsy vellum and parchment books, too; doctors even complained that they were medically dangerous for reading, and lawyers asserted that they could not legally be called "books," because of their ungainliness. These were reasons for the popularity of papyrus which reigned supreme because it was light, easily handled, and survived in the dry desert air for long periods of time.\(^1\)

And then paper was discovered!

It is hardly possible to think of a material upon which man did not write before the invention of paper!

He wrote on hard rock and soft stone and bone, on leather and parchment, on cotton and silk, on wooden tablets covered with vellum and linen, on birch bark and papyrus, on the inner bark of trees and also on the palm leaf and the leaf of Latania, on copperplate and on lacquered cardboard.\(^2\)

The Chinese had nothing to do with our writing except that they gave the world the invention of paper. It was during the Han dynasty in the first century, that the Chinese had taken a lesson from the wasp, which makes its nest by

\(^1\)Pinner, p. 19.

\(^2\)Etienne, p. 56.
chewing vegetable fibre and pressing the moist leavings into a film of even thickness. These practical people used anything they could get their hands on—old fishing nets, worn-out rope and hemp and macerated it in tubs. This mass was then pressed into sheets of desirable thickness and the fibres stuck together when dry. 175

A Chinese by the name of Ts'ai Lun, the Emperor's minister of Public Works, also experimented with the bark of mulberry trees and reported to his ruler (in the year 104 A.D.) that he had made the discovery of papermaking. The Mandarin, however, refused to share the secret of this marvelous new material that was so far superior to other writing surfaces; it did not reach the outside world until six hundred years later when it was found by the Arabs when they overran Samarkand in 750 A.D. 176

The Moslem invaders of Spain and Sicily brought paper with them into their conquered territories in the early eighth century, along with the recipe for making it from the basis of old rags. Paper making probably came later from Spain to Greece, entering the Western world from Jewish paper mills in the Spanish peninsula in the twelfth century A.D. 177 But for some time paper was not used by Latin Christendom because of its association with the then-hated Jewish people; also, the church did not consider it durable and permanent as

176 McMurtrie, p. 98.

177 Ibid., p. 99.

178 Ibid.
parchment and vellum; additionally, the guilds of parchment makers, very powerful in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, used their influence against the use of paper. 178

The first production of paper on a large scale was made in Germany in the fourteenth century where they experimented with water mills and learned to speed up maceration of the raw materials. They produced a fine paper which was the perfect medium for printing, also begun in that country a century later. 179

Paper was perfected by degrees over the years and came with the Pilgrims on the Mayflower. Benjamin Franklin, in his time, was the largest consumer of paper in his publication of the Pennsylvania Gazette and Poor Richard's Almanac. Before 1799 all paper was made in sheets, one by one, and although much cheaper and better than parchment and vellum, it cost much more per sheet than it does now. Today, however, it is made in continuous rolls; if sheets are required, the rolls are "sheeted" into proper sizes for books and magazines, newspapers, and stationery. 180

Every imaginable tool has been used, with a chisel on stone, with the fingernail or fingertip in sand and dust; with engraving points and punches; with stylus and stiletto; with reeds and feathers of all kinds of birds; sharpened sticks; metal pens with large nibs; steel pens with fine points; with iridium gold nibs; with lead pencils; with pieces of chalk;

178 Ibid., p. 105.

179 Ibid., p. 106.

Following the chisel and the stone knife, came the pen as a writing tool. First, for writing on palm leaves and papyrus, was the reed pen obtained in the same waters as the papyrus plant. It was made into a point, similar to the quill pen which came later, and was called "calamus" which in time came to be accepted as a symbol of friendship. Walt Whitman, in fact, looking for a token of the love of comrades chose this common plant, saying, "And here what I now draw from the water...shall henceforth be the token of comrades this calamus-root shall." Such is the message of the pen!

The quill pen was used quite early; in oldest England it was called the "feer" using the runic thorne, and in the leisurely days of the lace ruff and powdered wig every man was his own pen maker. In France it was called the "penna" and it is also pictured in portrayals of the very first Irish scriptoriums. When it was brought to America where Colonial settlers had a wealth of wild birds to choose from, pen making became an important part of education with the schoolmaster trained in the technique of cutting pens. School children were taught the art: feathers (a choice of goose, swan, eagle, owl, hawk or turkey) were soaked overnight, then heated and scraped to remove the skin coating.

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183 Etiemble, p. 18.
184 Ries, p. 179.
The nib was then cut and split and reheated to give an elasticity and toughness. To this day, pocket knives once used for this purpose are called "penknives." The signers of the Declaration of Independence used quill pens, as did everyone else and they remained in use until the nineteenth century when steel pens and lead pencils came into vogue.  

A turkey or goose feather such as the one shown here was treated and the barbs were removed. A clean-cut point was greatly to be desired, and was considered a real art. Turkey feathers were slim and light so that they were comfortable carried over the ear.

The first metallic pen was made in 1790 in England and with it came a gradual decline in actual "script writing" such Gothic letters. It was not used in or America until the nineteenth century when it gave rise to the "penmanship" era which such penmen as George Bickman, England and Spencer and Zaner of the United States introduced "beautiful" writing flourishes and fine-pen adornment. The steel pen was a part of the signing of the surrender of the Confederate Armies, for General Grant used a steel pen in that

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ceremony. His pen was attached to a penholder which was actually an inkwell built into the handle. From this type of pen was later developed the "stylograph" used with a small plunger valve which opened on contact with the paper to release a fine flow of ink; the familiar fountain pen operates on the capillary attraction principle. 187

Most recent invention for writing has been the ball-point pen that writes on a small steel ball which revolves in a socket, a principle introduced by one Sirus Kochendar of America, in 1896, but which has not, even yet, been perfected for fine writing. 188

Naturally the pen was always used with ink; when reed pens were used, scribes made their own ink from special herbs, soot, or lamp black. The earliest name for this writing substance was "blæc" (an Old English word) because it was black in color, but on the French tongue it became "enque" from which we get our word "ink." When the monk scribes slaved over their manuscripts they held "enque horns" in their hands and dipped quill pens into ink as they needed it; later in the Irish scriptoriums, holes were cut in writing tables to hold the ink horns and the scribes called them "enque homes." 189

This was practiced in the New World, and only abandoned in the last decade or two. Earlier, in Colonial days, portable inkwells were also used, undoubtedly as they had been used


188 Ibid.

189 Etiemble, p. 17.
in Europe; they were made of stoneware in several shapes. In the absence of blotters which were a late American invention, the European custom of sprinkling fine sand over ink writing was practiced. These "ink dryers," as they were called, were fashioned similarly to our present-day salt-shakers; the writer merely sprinkled sand on wet ink and brushed it away when dry.

Schoolboys of England and early America did not waste precious paper for everyday lessons, but they used "hornbooks," little wooden paddles to which a lesson sheet of paper was attached. Over this sheet of paper was placed a thin layer of cow horn to keep the lesson clean as it was passed from child to child. As paper was not manufactured in England until after America was discovered and only made in America in 1690 (one William Bradford established a mill in Skulhill, Pennsylvania191) these two countries utilized the humble substance to preserve their short supply of paper.

190Sloane, p. "I."

We would think its preparation to be slow and awkward, for:

True horn consists of albumen...and a little phosphate of lime; it is readily softened by boiling water or heat; sometimes the process is aided by the addition of quicklime. It is usual to prepare the horns of oxen and sheep by steeping them for several weeks, cold water separating the bony part from the cover of true horn.192

No other country used hornbooks, and loads of them came to America from the Mother country. They were very popular until paper became plentiful and almost disappeared from the American scene as their shape made them perfect paddles to use in a game called "battledore and shuttlecock."193

Slate boards and chalk were used in the nineteenth century; these school slates resembled the early "codices" on which black wax was used, but paper replaced them and they soon became impractical also.

The most common writing tool, even in a day of dozens of writing inventions, is still the common "lead" pencil which is not really lead at all. The ancient Egyptians and Romans did use lead for writing, but we use "graphite" pencils which make darker marks than lead. Graphite was first discovered in Cumberland, England, in 1564194 and has, more than any other tool for writing, remained popular the whole world over.

Christopher Columbus, to persuade Queen Isabella to

192 Ibid.
193 Gloane, postscript.
194 Ries, p. 243.
finance his expedition, used a lead pencil to make notes and sketches to prove to her that the world was round; Franz Shubert wrote, "Hark, Hark the Lark" on the back of a menu with a pencil; Thomas Jefferson made constant notes with a pencil as he rode from Monticello to Washington, D.C. in his buggy; and Abraham Lincoln wrote the Gettysburg Address with a pencil on the back of an envelope, enroute by train to dedicate that cemetery. And in spite of all scientific advances, this little cylinder has remained a "magic wand" in the hands of writers even in a day of advanced mechanism.

Sometimes new ideas seem to float around in the atmosphere and are caught in different places at about the same time. This is what happened with the invention of printing. Although the Chinese had crude block printing in the sixth century and movable types by 1050, the idea did not penetrate to the Western world until the Renaissance years when Johann Gutenberg of Germany, and William Caxton of England were both working on the same idea. Gutenberg was first with his movable type, printing the first book in Gothic letters—The Gutenberg Bible—then Caxton in England printed, also in Gothic letters, Dictes and Notable Wise Sayings of the Philosophers in 1477 in English, instead of Latin.\footnote{196 UNESCO, p. P.}

In Italy, a country of people quick to grasp at beauty, the first types were cut in the Humanistic script, "a sloping letter based on the current cursive hand, Italic."\footnote{197 Nesbitt, p. 15.} It was recognized for its grace and beauty, and copied all over Europe, except in England where writers plodded on with Gothic letters until the 1700's so that their printing was
All through history, the development of writing, as we have seen, has depended upon artifacts: the papyrus, vellum, parchment and papers; the liquids, various inks which had to be created from nature's products; and the instruments—incisors, styluses, quills, reed and finally steel pens. And most important, it had depended upon the creative skill of carvers, artists and scribes. Now, suddenly, breathtakingly, the world was given a means of producing large numbers of copies of books, papers, or any written matter. And what was the reaction to this remarkable new invention?

People were ashamed to own a printed book! Even in the beginning of the sixteenth century at the beginning of the Humanistic movement, the only respectable book was the handwritten one. In Ireland, where handwritten books were a tradition, the practice of copying manuscripts continued until the nineteenth century. The last of the professional scribes, one Joseph O'Longan, died only in 1880 after a lifetime of handwriting books.

The printers went to a great deal of trouble to cut their letters to resemble everyday handwritings, progressing from Gothic to Roman script and other more smoothly flowing type. Caxton eventually realized that his books would be more beautiful in flowing handwriting and some of his earliest editions of Chaucer's works were produced that way.

198 Ibid., p. 57.
199 Dillon, p. xiii.
200 Hornung, p. 51.
There was, in the beginning, bitter animosity between scribes and those who imitated their work by reproductive means.

The illiterate superstitious European of the fifteenth century found it difficult to conceive that words, until then laboriously copied by hand from old manuscripts onto sheets of vellum, could be multiplied with such speed and even more astounding that all the books looked exactly alike. The printer was in league with the devil and until this day, young printing assistants are called "printers' devils," and the box that holds old worn-out type is called the "hell box."\footnote{201}{Ibid.}

As late as three hundred years ago people were suspicious of the freedom of the press. In Virginia, the governor, William Berkeley said, "I thank God we had not free schools or printing... for learning has brought disobedience and heresy and sects into the world; and printing has divulged them... God keep us from both."\footnote{202}{Lehmann-Haupt, p. 89.}

In London, the Bishop complained that, "Some sons of iniquity have craftily translated the Holy Gospel of God into our vulgar English."\footnote{203}{Ibid.}

Many printers paid heavy penalties through the years for their craft: William Tyndale was put to death by strangulation and burning, for making an English translation of the scriptures. In the New World Benjamin Franklin's brother, James, was imprisoned several times and finally banned from any publishing (when this happened, Ben walked off the job all the way to Philadelphia where he became the most famous}
American printer of all!)) Nevertheless, more scriptures were printed and Luther and his enemies, both, used the new invention in their struggle over the scriptures (in Gothic letters). And we may say that the handwritten book made its demise in the sixteenth century.205

The first printing press set up in America was at Boston in 1638 in order to print materials for Harvard University, the first book being printed by Matthew Days and called The Whole Book of Psalms.206

With the invention of printing came the separation in men's minds of the letter forms of printing and writing actually done by hand. Ironically, after the seventeenth century writing was taught from the copy books which were made by the printer for that purpose. And so it seems that there had been an interchange in the creation of letters, with printers taking as their guides, the manual creation of letters and writers following these reproductions from the printed book and taking great pride in the perfection of handwriting!

204 Hornung, p. 51.

205 Oster, pp. 8, 4.

206 Ibid.
Handwriting arrived in America with the men of the Mayflower, those who signed the Pact on November 22nd, 1620, in "Ye (The) Name of God, Amen," before setting foot on the black soil of Massachusetts. Soon—within four years after the settlement at Plymouth—they began to give thought to educating their children and the first school law was finally passed in 1633. Even before this, the Winslows and the Bradfords had provided instruction in reading and writing for their sons in a still jealously guarded male world, for the Pilgrim Fathers agreed that education of girls, "was a vain and idle thing...and women should mind their own business, that of cooking, spinning, washing and bearing children--often." 207

In 1667, the early settlers gave "serious consideration that there be a schoolmaster in every town to teach the children reading and writing," although very few, even of "ye (the) wretched boys," learned more than the three "R's." The funds from a Cape Cod fishery were used in 1770 to provide $250.00 for a teacher at a common school in Plymouth; John

Morton was hired to instruct in casting up accounts, reading and writing. His successor added Latin and Greek to the curriculum and was fired for his effort, as the Pilgrims felt that "higher learning" was not necessary (it was enough if the children learned to write, cipher and read the Bible). 208

The first schoolhouse was built at Plymouth in 1675 and "every scollar that coms to wright or syfer or to learn latten, shall paye 3 pence pr. weke; if to read onlie, then to paye half-pence per weke." 209 The Pilgrim Fathers then turned their efforts to educating the Indians, but girls were not admitted to Massachusetts public schools on equal footing with boys until 1838, although a "female school" did open in 1795 for summer schooling only. 210

From these meager beginnings, American handwriting developed; the early teachers, however, spent nearly as much time preparing pens, hornbooks, and tablets (foolscap was handstitched at home if the paper were available) and copies of exercises, as he did in teaching. 211

In the form of writing itself, the number of different hands available was legion; the earliest American had a choice of roundhand, plain or ordinary Italian, ordinary running hand, Roman, Italic, Old English, German Text and other styles,

208 Ibid., p. 387.

209 Ibid., p. 388.


211 Ibid., p. 18.
taught along with embellishment and flourishing. Everyone desired to write a good hand, and writing specialists advertised constantly that they were available to "teach a good legible hand." Typical, is the ad of Mr. M. Epplinestone, in 1850, to "teach persons of both sexes, from twelve years to age fifty, who never wrote before, or to improve such as write indifferently. . . to write a good hand in five weeks at an hour per day."

In 1834, John Quincy Adams showed the general attitude toward handwriting when he said, "Good penmanship is to business, what fragrance is to flowers and what courtesy is to manhood. . ." It was also he who rescued from oblivion the Mayflower pact when he came across it by accident.

Some American penmen have deplored the wide use of calligraphy (the art of beautiful writing) with the fine steel pen, introduced in 1820 in America for business purposes and later for "fine writing." Nesbitt also asserts:

Manuscript writing came to an end with the invention of printing and. . . the introduction of the pointed pen ruined all severe style and its use had left us, at the present time, with a general writing style that is too often a sprawling, scratching business, as illegible as it is unlovely. It (calligraphy) is an arbitrary and ostentatious display of penmanship that developed with the introduction of the pointed pen. Penmanship, on the whole, is a pretty sort of thing, full of vanity and sheer

212 Ibid., p. 19.


"Beautiful writing," according to many professional penmen should be done with the broad-edged pen, modeled on the ancient reed and quill. Unlike the flexible pointed pen, the broad-edged pen can enrich the pattern of writing by a ribbon of alternating thick and thin strokes created with pressure, they maintain.

In England, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, nevertheless, such beautiful writing had begun with penmen who not only ran their own writing schools but created exquisite handwriting portfolios--these folios being first engraved on metal plates and then printed into books, and copy-books. Naturally these writings, all written in various European styles were copied by Americans until their own copy-books were printed.

Some "firsts" in American handwriting manuals were The Writing Scholar's Assistant by Isaiah Thomas, in 1785; A Manual of Handwriting, in roundhand, by John Jenkins, in 1791; and the use of Benjamin Franklin's plates for The American Instructor or a Young Man's Best Companion from which various hands (round, Italian, secretary and print

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216 Ibid., p. 187.


218 Ibid., Note 34.
hand) were printed. With these and others, the great commercial entry into the field of handwriting was begun.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, a young man by the name of Platt Rogers Spencer developed a "new" handwriting which was a sloping, semi-angular style, rapid and legible, which lent itself easily to embellishment. Spencer's writing became very popular through his famous Log Cabin Seminary which was held annually on his farm until his death in 1864. His five sons carried on his work and made "Spencer" a well-known name in American penmanship. Here again, a general style was associated with writing, for along with gingerbread Gothic architecture (revived in America at that time), overstuffed Victorian furniture and dress, the Spencerian system followed naturally.

The "new" Spencerian differed from roundhand in that:

...he dropped the regular rhythmic recurrence of heavy lines on the downstrokes, the feature of English Round hand. He substituted a fine line with apparently irregular use of heavy strokes, but the capitals, usually are made with a heavy line on the downstroke, made by pressing apart the nibs of the pointed pen.

He also offered, side by side with his standard alphabet, a reduced version known as the "ladies hand" in half size, which was "well received by female seminaries."

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219 Filby, Note 45.

220 Ibid.

221 Wesbitt, p. 186.

222 Filby, Note 45.
Other familiar names to American handwriting are those of C. P. Zaner, who published his handwriting textbooks in 1895 and established a penmanship college in Columbus, Ohio; and Austin N. Palmer, who in the interest of greater speed eliminated manual pressure on the pen, and reduced all lines to uniform thickness to produce the "business" or "commercial" hands which have been taught ever since. These two penmen were the first to use "push and pulls" and "ovals" to encourage free arm movement in writing. 223

The necessity for using handwriting in business came to an end in 1868 with the invention of the typewriter, for until then legal documents, account books, orders, shipping lists—all commercial transactions as well as all social writing had been done in "beautiful writing." The pursuit of faster writing then came in the mechanical form of the typewriter, hailed by some and disapproved of by professional penmen who considered its invention the death knell to really good handwriting. 224

The typewriter was another idea that occurred to several people at about the same time, the world over. In 1840, a Frenchman invented a machine which he called the "klypographic" which, it was claimed by its creator, could print almost as fast as one could write with an ordinary pen! Later, in America in 1857, Dr. Samuel W. Francis invented a "piano-like" typewriter which printed with a speed exceeding

223_223Tibid., Note 93. 224_Nesbitt, p. 182.
that of the pen! And it was an American, finally, who perfected a machine which was the latest phase in the writing story. It used only small Roman capitals, and interestingly, Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) was the first author to submit a typewritten manuscript for publication.225

The effect that the typewriter has had on handwriting in the past hundred years is said by penmen to be "too hurried and undisciplined, and written without consideration for beauty and grace;" they maintain also that the human eye reacts more favorably to the slight uneveness of writing than to the mechanically perfect type.226

Produced, now, with typefaces to serve the letters of practically all languages of the world, the typewriter, undoubtedly serves its purpose. Beautiful, pen-produced writing also serves its purpose for those who require the satisfaction that comes from creating something of lasting beauty; therefore, an even wider separation has come into the minds of writers regarding type and handwriting, and surely wisdom dictates the use of each.

225 Herkimer County Historical Society, p. 72.

226 Nesbitt, p. 186.
CONCLUSION

If a pilgrim, endowed with immortality, could have followed the path of handwriting as it has come to us from the Semite, he would have witnessed, in addition to the development of handwriting, astounding changes and events as he traveled through cultures, countries and centuries from his early time to ours.

He would have begun with A Certain Semite of a far-away time who utilized the abundant clay of his desert land for writing, an art which the Semites with their cuneiform letters, first gave to the world (3000 B.C.).

The pilgrim might have been awed at the crafty kinsmen of the Semite, the leading business men of that time (800 B.C.) who created an alphabet suitable for their commercial transactions. He would have traveled with those Phoenician business men through the Mediterranean as they traded with island cities, and would finally have disembarked at Athens, center of Grecian culture, and listened to erudite scholars discuss the necessity of adding vowels to the consonantal alphabet which they had acquired from the Phoenicians (600 B.C.). Perhaps he would have learned to write the incipient uncial and half-uncial letters being used by the Greek playwrights, philosophers and novelists even as they were
under siege by the Spartans (400 B.C.), and later by the Romans. His knowledge of the letters might have served him well if he had been carried to Rome with learned captives who soon purveyed Grecian culture to their Roman captors (200 B.C.).

Undoubtedly the pilgrim would have been adventurous enough to march with Roman soldiers as they subdued one country after another to become rulers of the world (100 A.D.). He might, however, have chosen to follow with missionaries who settled where the soldiers settled and taught Christianity. And he would have been as surprised as the rest of the far-flung Empire when Rome slowly disintegrated before masses of human beings who swarmed into Italy from the North and overran the whole civilized world of that time (4th through the 7th centuries).

He would have grieved to see the Arts, including writing, vanish before the uncivilized hordes as they destroyed vast records of previous civilizations, and perhaps he would have fled with educated missionaries into remote cloisters for safety and for perpetuation of the fading culture he had known. France might have been his destination, or one of the Germanic countries, but later he would have found himself fleeing the same barbarians who streamed through Italy overland to the very banks of the English channel (451 A.D.).

Or if he were fortunate enough, he would have been one of those who sailed the dark waters below England in a long boat, over an old trade route from Loire on the Seine, to
disembark at Cork, Dublin, or at Belfast in a strange, enchanted land which lay far from the violence of the barbarians (3rd and 4th centuries).

As time passed he would have gone into the north of England where early English writers such as Bede and Alcuin (6th and 7th centuries) taught the pointed handwriting which he had seen develop in Ireland and pass into England. And, unfortunately, he would have witnessed, once again, bloodshed and plundering of culture centers when the Danes descended upon Ireland and England to destroy priceless records and manuscripts which might have given the art of writing to civilization much earlier. The pilgrim might then have fled back to the Continent with many other learned men where writing and other arts were at last emerging from their hiding places under the emperor Charlemagne (9th century). Or he might have stayed to fight with King Alfred who was intent on educating the people of England even as he fought the Norsemen (9th century).

After that he would have stayed in England observing the ebb and flow of writing styles and forms which Englishmen acquired from other countries: from Ireland, the pointed script which they ultimately made even more pointed; from France, the Carolingian minuscule, adopted under pressure from their Norman conquerors (1066); from the German (13th century) the "black letter" to which they clung tenaciously until their widening world of commerce demanded the more easily written scripts, court hand, text hand, several "secretary" hands, and finally, roundhand (17th century).
Perhaps the pilgrim would have sailed to Plymouth in the New World, taking with him his knowledge of the variety of handwritings he had learned in England, and he would have rejoiced in the new invention of printing which made American writing more easily available (1620).

Such a pilgrim on such a path would now have been on the trek with handwriting for 5000 years, 350 of them in the Americas, and he would now be poised to leave its earthly path, with man on his quest through space, to see even more fascinating developments in the future of handwriting.
The Path of the Written Language From A Certain Semite To Us

Atlantic Ocean

To Plymouth Rock and the New World

England

North Sea

Scotland

Ireland

North

France

Germanic Countries

Russia and Other Countries

Spain

Corsica

Sardiner

Italy

Mediterranean Sea

Sicily

Crete

Egypt

Other African Countries

Cyprus

Ancient Phoenicia

Iraq

Ancient Sumer

Ancient Sumer

Land of the Semites
APPENDIX
APPENDIX

The Semite's ox gave him the inspiration for the shape of the first "A".

The cuneiform "A" was turned on the side made with a stylus on clay.

The Phoenician made the abstract outline of the ox's head.

The Greek may have turned it upside down, accidentally!

The Roman perfected it as a capital, it was incised on stone in perfect proportions.

"Beautiful" writing developed in the 18th and 19th centuries in England and in America, with penmanship.

The "uncial form" developed in the sixth century. It was a rounded version of the Roman square capital. The "half-uncial" was developed into the Carolingian miniscule. A script form evolved from the minuscule.

The "Italic" form has a grace which was developed in Italy.
This is the shape of a Semitic home, a house which they called "beth"; it is as old as "A" having been used 3000 years ago.

Cuneiform looked like this.

The Semite used a rude letter to resemble his "beth."

The Phoenician made this abstract symbol of it by carelessness.

The Greeks called it Beta and gave it a second story. Early Greeks turned it in this direction.

Later Greeks turned it to face the way we use it.

The Trajan capital was developed by the Roman

It retained its shape as a rounded uncial.

It became a half-uncial from which the minuscule developed.

This is the graceful form of the "Italic."

Script developed and even as early as the fourth century certain letters gained "ascenders" and "descenders." This was the earliest hint of the development of "minuscules."

The cursive "b" ascends above the line.
This ungainly animal was called "gimel" by the Semites and "gamma" by the Greeks. The shape of both "C" and "G" comes from the underneath curve of the camel's neck.

Early form taken from the lower curve of the neck.

The Romans curved it and gave it its classic proportions.

Until the third century, K, C, and Q all sounded alike. G was given a little bar to acquire a different sound from the hard C.

The Greeks reversed the direction.

It retained its shape through the uncial forms, except in height.

And also through to Italic and cursive forms.
This is another home, a tent often used by the Semites; the door was called the "daleth." From it comes the basic shape for our "D."

The imaginative Semite took this shape for the fourth letter of the alphabet.

The Greek used both these shapes for their delta; they rounded off the corner of the right triangle.

The uncial forms of the "D" are graceful and reached their best form in these smaller rounded forms in the Caroline letters.

Cuneiform was more angular and had a tail.

It became a beautiful rounded capital with the Romans.

This is the approximate shape of the Italian "italic."
"E" of English developed from the Semitic "He" meaning "look" or "see" - perhaps out the window which this symbol represented.

Later, the Phoenicians gave it a shape which really looked like a window.

This is "E" in the Roman proportions

The Greek used it facing this direction when they received the alphabet.

When the uncial form of "E" developed into a round letter there were different forms with the two upper arms connected sometimes.

The half uncial first looked like this. It is easy to see its relationship to the present "E."

The "Italic" shows a relationship to present day printing.
The tent peg of the old Semite was the early inspiration for the letter "F."

The Greeks used these forms—early and late—and named "F" "digamma."

They pronounced this letter as we pronounce our "W."

The Romans made it a classic capital, and were the first to pronounce it "ef" as we do.

Uncial forms followed the Roman form, with more curves. The half-uncial pointed the way to the small "f" form which is used today.

The F was a shape, fascinating to cursive and penmanship writing.
This strange looking "I" was used by the Phoenicians in the shape of a silhouette of the hand. It was called "yod," meaning "hand."

The Greeks simply used a stroke; they called it "Iota."

Semitic may have used the Egyptian hieroglyph in the early days.

Cuneiform was punched into clay like this:

The Gothic "I" could hardly be seen in close writing so it was dotted.

In the Middle Ages words with doubled "i's" were confusing so the tail of one was added and became the "J" we know. It was not used by the Romans, but it would have been encised in this Roman shape if they had known it then.

Cursive forms developed.
The open hand was the form used to fashion the "K," which stood for "kaph" meaning a hollow such as the palm of the "yod."

Hieroglyph hand

The first Semitic "K" lay on its back.

Cuneiform took this shape.

The Phoenician "K" had awkward "fingers."

The Greeks set it up but turned it backwards. They named it "kappa."

The rounded uncial form resembles our present-day "R."

The Romans didn't use it (they used "C" for the sound) but they printed it in classic style.

The Carolingian small letter was a graceful minuscule.

The Italic was also graceful.

The cursive "K" has an ascender.
The whiplash, or Semitic ox-goad gave us the pattern for our letter "l" and the Phoenician used these three forms to represent it.

The cuniform shape in clay.

In Egypt the lion, or "labo" stood for the letter "l."

The Greek used two forms: this

and this. They called it "lambda."

The rounded uncial form.

The italic form of "l."

The Romans encised it on the Trajan capital.

These cursive forms gave rise to "penmanship" in later centuries.
"Mem" was the Semitic name for water; they used the tailed "M."

Cuneiform shows the form from which it took its stylized figure.

The Greeks made their "mu" more compact

The Phoenician, familiar with the seas, gave it the lasting shape.

The Romans gave it its classic dimensions

The italic form followed that of the half-uncial

The letter lent itself to rounding for the uncial forms.

Penmanship Roundhand and cursive forms developed in later centuries.
The Semite used the shape of the mouth of the fish, or "nun" to form the letter "N" and the Phoenician used the same shape.

They later took this letter and called it "nu."

The early Greek form looked almost "cursive."

Cuneiform looked like this.

The Roman cut it into stone with "serifs."

This is the uncial form.

"Penmanship" sloped the capital "n" gracefully and the cursive "n" was more fluid.

And this is the half-uncial.

Italics made it more graceful.
The "o" has remained the same since the Semite took the shape of the eye or "ayin" in 900 B.C.

Greeks called the large "o" "Omega" and it represented the long "o" sound. The little letter was called "omicron" and was the sound as heard in the word "got."

Cuneiform's simplest form stood for the "o."

Uncial forms could hardly be more rounded than the original forms.

The Roman "O" was proportioned within the square allotted it, as with other Roman capitals.

Italics became ovals.

"Penmanship" letters were more embellished than other simple "O's."

These are the familiar cursive letters.
"Peh" is the Semitic word for mouth. It requires imagination to see how the shape of "P" was taken from the lower lip.

The Greeks began with this crook, then reversed it, and altered it to this, and finally used this as their alphabetic "P."

Rome lengthened the stem of the Greek P, but finally designed a more pleasing form.

The shape of the letter lent itself to permanship creations.

The cursive letter took different form in the 18th century.
The Greek and Roman took this shape and Greeks called it "koppi" while the Romans gave it the name "koo."

Penman were very imaginative in the 18th century, when these large and running shapes were adapted.

Italic forms were developed from the uncial shapes.

A combination of cuneiform figures.
The Phoenician "Rosh" meant head; the "R" was taken from a profile view of the head, and turned backward.

Early people pronounced it "air."

The Greeks set it up straight, then turned it in the opposite direction and through carelessness gave it a short tail.

With Roman dimensions and serifs, it became a beautiful letter.

Uncial. The half-uncial became the familiar shape of the small "r" as it is also fashioned in Italics.

Cursive and penmanship forms were inspired by various forms of the letter.
The zig-zag shape of teeth was the inspiration for the letter "S."

And the Phoenician took a shape which looks like our "W."

The Greek "S" was set up but in a reverse direction.

A graceful combination of cuneiform impressions make up the Semitic letter.

The early Roman curved it and finally made it a classic "S."

Italic forms resemble the Italic "S" which was often a ligature with "T."

These script shapes appeared in the 18th century.

Penmanship forms were inspired by the shape of the "S."
"T" is one form of "X" or the cross shape. It was used by the Ancients as their "tahv."

The Greeks' "Tau" was used in the familiar way.

The Romans gave it serifs to soften the Greek form.

A form of the crossed "t" is called the Egyptian "key of life."

One of the simplest cuneiform shapes represent the "t."

The uncial forms resemble the Italic shape of "t."

The first cursive had a very low cross bar.

The "T" lends itself to "beautiful" writing.
The Phoenician "vau" nail, or hook was the inspiration for both "u" and "v.

The Egyptian chose a long stemmed letter.

The Greek used the "F" shape to represent all of the letters inspired by "vau" - U, V, F and W (which came later). They used it for a sound which is not used in English.

The Romans made the "U" like a capital "V" and used it for two sounds: oo as in moon for the vowel, and w as in wind for the consonant. Later they used a round "U."

In the 1500's the U and V were separated with the rounded vowel placed first (the twenty-first letter) to stand for the familiar "U" sound.

The cuneiform stylization of the hook or nail.

The uncials and italic forms were very similar.

Cursive "U's" were formed later.
The "support" or "prop" gave the Semite the idea for the letter "X."

The oldest cross form was this one used by those ancients.

The Greeks had two forms - the Western branch pronounced it "eks" as we do - but Eastern Grecian states pronounced it "kh."

The "X" in any language is almost unnecessary as it was to the Romans. Cuneiform. Uncial and Italic forms.

Cursive was employed for speed.
Although the Greeks had no sound comparable to those English sounds they used this reverse F if they needed to use a "W."

The Romans introduced the bonifide "y" form.

In ancient days there was no counterpart for the letter "Y" - the Anglo-Saxons called it the double "wen" and it became the double "vay" in French, and finally the double "oo" on the English tongue.

Pythagoras used this symbol to represent "a choice in life" made by young men of that Classic era.

It acquired a tail to become the "thorn" with the pronunciation of "th" and was tacked on at the end of the alphabet when it came to represent the "Y" of "you."

It is rather easy to see why the Y, U, and Y shapes were evolved from the old tent peg, the "vau"-nail and hook of the Semites and Phoenicians.

It is difficult to imagine all these alphabet forms as being derived from the same early symbol, but such is the case.
The letter "Z" was derived for some reason from the Semitic "zayin" which meant dagger, or weapon.

The Phoenician originated this shape - reversed to the present direction of "z."

The Greeks used this form as early as 600 B.C.

And the Roman turned it in the "right" direction and made it a perfectly balanced capital.

Uncial forms were more rounded, but the Italic letter returned to the older Roman shape.

"Z" lent itself to cursive form.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


