

Later study of this writing has shown that it had three stages: first, that of picture writing of the simplest kind (like that still used by American Indians), where the picture represents the actual object—for instance a picture of a lion to represent this animal. The second stage used the picture to signify a related idea—the picture of a lion would then, for instance, represent the idea of power. The third stage was the alphabetic, in which the picture signified the first sound used in naming it; the picture of a lion would then represent the letter L, the Egyptian word for lion being “labo.”

In process of time the pictures of the alphabetic stage were more and more simplified into symbolical and abbreviated forms, on account of the toil of carving them, or just as in writing we may grow to shorten and abbreviate the forms of our own letters. For example, the picture of a sieve had been used to denote the sound H. The sieve was finally denoted by a circle with a single line across it, instead of many . The Phœnician merchants of the coast of

Syria, who borrowed this alphabet, found it simpler to make the form . This, as adopted by the Greeks, was written , the form from which the letter H is taken. (The letter H, in Greek use, was subsequently replaced by a “breathing” mark, or aspirate sign.)

Through similar transformation, all other letters of the Phœnician alphabet were modified from Egyptian hieroglyphics and transmitted through the Greeks to later times; all known alphabets of Europe being modified Phœnician. The Phœnician derivation of our alphabet has been always admitted, but its Egyptian origin is one of the latest results of historic study. The most important fact of Egyptian history is that we owe to it the alphabet in which our books are written.

TEMPLE RUINS OF EGYPT.

When modern travelers saw the wonderful temple ruins of Egypt entirely covered with hieroglyphic carvings; when they saw the mummy cases (coffins) and papyrus rolls found in them, covered with hieroglyphic writing; it was natural for them to suppose that mysterious secrets would be discovered, and untold knowledge unfolded, after this writing should be deciphered. But the result of deciphering the hieroglyphics was on the whole disappointing. Much was made known of deep interest, but the results did not meet the expectation. The temple inscriptions were found to