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Origin and Progress of Penmanship by M. P. Riordan.

(Delivered before the French Teachers' Association in connection with the Jacques-Cartier Normal School, Montreal, May 28th, 1875.)

Mr. President and Gentlemen.

Having consulted several authorities on the subject of penmanship, the following opinions concerning the origin seem the most probable and correct.

It was considered in ancient times by the heathen writers that it was a gift vouchsafed to man by the gods themselves, and many enlightened christians suppose that it was first revealed to man from the summit of Mount Sinai amid the thunders of the giving of the law and testimony. Others have maintained that the art of writing must in some degree or shape have been familiar to Adam our great progenitor, since he named the objects, which God had created around him, and must have endeavoured to eternalize their names, upon the earth.

To this belief incline St. Augustine and Josephus—Two pillars were said to have existed in Syria in the time of the last mentioned author, on which writing and engravings executed by Seth the grandson of Adam still remained. Modern critics on history, however have claimed, that Josephus here committed an error, and that the Seth of whom he speaks, must have been the Sesostris of a later time.

The theory of Josephus was advocated in a celebrated work called the Vatican Library, composed by Mutus Pausa the librarian, and was published at Rome in 1590 ; and the question of its origin was warmly debated by the Egyptians and Phœnicians who contended for the high national honor with zeal and ability :—but it is now generally conceded that Cadmus the Phœnician introduced letters into Greece about 1500 B.C., and that they were then only sixteen in number to which four were afterwards added by Palamedis and four by Simonides the poet.

From Greece letters were brought to Latium by Evander, Evander was honored as a god after his death and an Altar was erected to his memory on Mount Aventine between the temples of Juno and the Bona Dea, this was a tribute paid to him by the Romans for his scholarship and knowledge of letters.

When letters first came into use among the Romans, written history began to be regarded with great favor, every nation that could had its own records of priceless value, while the minds that ordained and the hands that shaped the forms of imagery which gave lasting existence to national glory, were regarded with reverence bordering on idolatry.

As to the manner of writing it was different in different countries :—The Greeks originally wrote from right to left and from left to right alternatively. The Hebrews and Assyrians, from right to left, and the Chinese from the top to the bottom of the page. They wrote upon bark polished wood, &c., using reed or iron for pens.

But Mr. President and Gentlemen, permit me here to remark, with regard to the art : we read in early history that the Phœnicians were a great manufacturing and commercial people, Tyre being at that time the first place or as it was termed the first work shop in the world, that from amid the noise of her looms and spindles went forth her ships laden with the Tyrian people and the products, of her handicraft :—It is not improbable then that the art of writing originated with them, from the necessity of keeping something in the shape of a record of their commercial doings, as well as some permanent description of their vast machinery and the manner of employing it : Perhaps from this has arising the saying that writing is the soul of commerce.