

according to one of the Sagas, Oluf built a large house, on the bulks and spars of which he had engraved the history of his own and of more ancient times.

DISCOVERY OF THE ALPHABET—PAPYRUS—TABLETS—PARCHMENTS.

This rude and clumsy system at length gave way to the invention of Phonetic characters, or marks expressive of different sounds, that is to say, to the discovery of the Alphabet, which may be looked upon as the earliest triumph of mental civilization. Phœnicia and Egypt, the two great nurseries of the human intelligence, contend for the honour of this most important invention.

It was by the Egyptians, in accordance with the idea which runs through the whole ancient mythology of deifying the man who had rendered signal service to his kind, attributed to their god, Thoth, whom we see so frequently represented in Hieroglyphics with the head of an ibis. The date assigned to this discovery is two thousand years before the Christian æra, and it is said to have been carried to Greece by Cadmus, five hundred years later.

It is evident that a more convenient and manageable form of writing was the immediate consequence, and that less bulky and extensive materials could thenceforth be used for purposes of inscription. We consequently find manuscripts of a date nearly approaching to this æra; and the Papyrus of Assa, now in the Imperial Library at Paris, is supposed to date from about two thousand years before Christ.

Stone, however, and metal seem to have been the materials principally adopted in the first instance, and I need hardly refer for examples to the Decalogue or Tables of the Law engraved on stone, or to the Laws of the Decemvirs at Rome which were inscribed on brass.

We are told that the works of Hesiod, the earliest Greek poet, were written upon leaden tablets, and religiously preserved by the Boeotians in the Temple of the Muses, where they were shewn to the Geographer Pausanias in the second century after Christ.

Another remarkable material for writing upon was the skin of a Serpent, on which we are informed that the Iliad and Odyssey of Homer were inscribed. We are told of one written in a character so minute, that it was said to have been enclosed in the shell of a walnut. The other deserves remembrance from its connexion with Alexander the Great, who, when asked to what use an invaluable casket found among the spoils of Darius should be put, replied that it should be kept to enclose his copy of Homer. This tribute from the mighty conqueror to the great poet deserves to be recorded, and may, perhaps, entitle Bibliographers to claim the great Alexander as a brother Bibliomaniac.

A third instance of a singular material is the use of the blade bones of shoulders of mutton by Mahomet, for the transcription of the Koran. These bones so inscribed are said to have been given into the custody of his favorite wife, Khadidjah, who kept them in the household chest, among her linen.

Two Mexican manuscripts are extant, one in the library at Dresden, the other at Vienna, which are written upon human skin. This circumstance reminds me that books exist, which were bound in the same hideous material during the horrors of the first French revolution.

The use of wood, or rather of ligneous products, in their various forms of board, of bark, and of leaf, appears to have marked the æra of the first real development of the book. I venture to make this assertion, grounding it on the remarkable way in which it is borne out by Etymology. Many of the words in ordinary use, in all modern languages, for expressing the book, or parts of the book, are immediately derived from the different portions of the tree which were thus employed. I will instance the word *Codex*, which was in classical Latin used for a book, though it is now confined to the expression of a manuscript. The original meaning of *codex* was the stump of a tree.

Again *Liber* transmitted in its various forms of *livre*, *libro*, etc., into so many of the European languages, in its original signification meant the bark of a tree.

From *Folium*, the leaf of a tree, we have the word *Folio*, and singularly enough we preserve in our own idiom the identity of the word leaf as applied to both tree and book. The word *Biblos* in Greek, meant, like *liber* in Latin, the bark of a tree, and from thence came *Biblion*, a book, and in modern languages, Bible, in French Bible, in Italian Biblia, as the universally acknowledged title of the holiest of Books. It is most curious to find the self-same idea traceable in the Etymology of our own word *Book*, although that word springs from a northern instead of from a classical source, being derived from the Danish *Boc*, which means a Beech tree.

We have now arrived at the Table book, which again offers a curious illustration of the verbal phenomena to which I have just alluded, inasmuch as being in the first instance made of board it was called *table book* from *tabula* the Latin for a board.

These table books then were made of board, and were called in

Latin, *Pugillares*, which may be literary translated Hand-books. They were sometimes used in their naked simplicity, and sometimes covered with a thin coating of wax. They were written upon with a metal instrument called the *Stylus*. Both the *Stylus* and the *Pugillares*—the pen and the paper—must have been formidable weapons; for we find in Plautus a school-boy breaking his master's head with his *Pugillares*, and we are told by Suetonius that Julius Cæsar defended himself against his murderers in the Capitol with his *Stylus*, and thrust Cassius through the arm with it.

The same mode of writing continued in use down to the end of the fourteenth century, and we find in the year 1395, in an account roll of Winchester College, a charge for a table covered with green wax for the use of the choir, for the purpose of noting down their daily and weekly duties.

We find that ivory table books under the name of *Libri Elephantini*, were used at Rome for registering the Edicts of the Senate; and it is interesting to meet with tablets of the same description, and of the same material alluded to by Chaucer in his *Sompnoure's tale*.

A still further progress in the art of book making is marked by the introduction of paper made from the Papyrus, which is supposed to have taken place about six hundred years before the Christian æra.

I need not inform you of the nature and history of this interesting plant; but it may be new to some of my readers to hear that the Papyrus no longer exists in Egypt, and that, in the present day, the only natural habitat of the plant in its wild state is the river Cyane, near Syracuse, where I have seen it growing in the most luxuriant profusion.

The paper made from the Papyrus was for many centuries the great staple of Egypt, and contended against the gradually increasing use of parchment until the twelfth century, when it appears to have gone entirely out of use.

A yet more remarkable æra with respect to the history of books is inaugurated by the invention of parchment or vellum, which is in fact the only one of the ancient materials which continues in use up to our own day. The invention of parchment has been by many writers attributed to Attalus, King of Pergamus, who lived about two hundred years before the Christian æra, but it appears to have been known at a much earlier period. Still its name *Charta Pergamena* points to a probable improvement in the manufacture effected at Pergamus.

The form of the ancient book was a roll, hence called *Volumen*, from whence our word *Volume* is derived; and, I need not remind you of the numerous allusions to these rolls in the Bible. The parchment or papyrus paper was rolled round a wooden cylinder, being kept from displacement at either end by a projecting finial. These were called *cornua* or horns, and seem to have been gilt or otherwise ornamented. Numberless illustrations of the shape and the ornamentation of books at the classical period of Roman literature, may be found.

COPYISTS—COLLECTORS OF BOOKS—STYLES OF MANUSCRIPTS, ETC.

With the increased number and interest of books came an increase in the number of collectors and purchasers. Not that any thing in the shape of a bookseller's shop existed in ancient Rome, but a numerous staff of slaves trained for the purpose and called *Librarii* seems to have formed part of the household of every man of rank and wealth, and the productions of these diligent penmen were disposed of for the common profit of the master and the slave.

As a single illustrative example is more interesting than a volume of unconnected quotations, I will place before you the great orator and statesman, Cicero, as a memorable example of the book collector of his day; and from his life and letters a tolerably accurate idea may be formed of the mode then adopted to stock and store a library.

We find Cicero to have been a ravenous collector of objects of art of every kind, and to have given a general commission to his friend, Atticus, who was resident at Athens, to purchase for him every thing elegant and curious in Grecian art, and especially things of a literary kind, or proper for the furnishing of his academy, as he called his villa at Tusculum.

A library as perfect as it could be made seems to have been the chief object of his passion. This taste was shared by Atticus, who was remarkable for his numerous train of learned slaves, who copied for him; inasmuch as we are told by Cornelius Nepos, that he had not a footboy in his house who was not able to read and write for him. By this means he had acquired an extensive collection of books, which he desired to sell; and we find Cicero in repeated letters imploring his friend to keep the whole library undispersed and unbroken, until he could find the funds requisite for the purchase. Asinius Pollio, Crassus, Julius Cæsar, and Lucullus, are also mentioned as among the most splendid book collectors of their time. It is melancholy to reflect how completely all records of the