

ashen hue suggestive of the fall awaiting them at the hands of the four silent forms whose heads are scarcely visible above the blue stem. Now and then a fretful killdeer flies up with peevish cry, or a lark rises and whirrs away in headlong flight. These occasional sounds only emphasized the stillness.

But look! over on the north line a flicker and close to the flame a very flushed face. In a moment the light of the flame shows the boys near by preparing bunches of grass. One of them lights his grass torch and running backward, is dragging his flaming wisp along the ground. Swifter and swifter he flies as the flames come nearer and nearer to his hand. After him springs up a cheerful line of fire. Another is now ready with his bunch of grass, and holding his blazing torch on high, speeds down the line like a meteor, showering a train of sparks behind him. Soon is heard the merry crackle of the flames; the laughter and shouts when one of the company treads on a hot coal or sprawls headlong into a wash-out old road. It is a scene of wild revelry. The old North pasture, so solemn a few moments ago, fairly beams with mirth and jollity.

The breeze has arisen and the whole flaming battalion is advancing. The line does not move uniformly, but soon forms a "headfire" that goes sweeping over the hill, trailing a gleaming line from either side. Another "headfire" forms, then another, and now the lines are marching in all directions. Some are spreading far apart, others rushing together; some are calmly burning against the breeze, others are scooping out a ravine with a roar and crackle while the fragrant resinous smoke floats over all.

In the wake of the advancing flames, follow the dauntless firemen, the burnt prairie crunching agreeably under their feet. The burnt grass lies in fragile, fantastic curls, sending up here and there, ghostly little forms of smoke.

But warmer work is in store for the department. The fire has jumped the south "hedge-row," and is making a rush for the hay-stacks in the south pasture. All now is excitement. The sacks, wrung out in water, are used as flails to beat out the fire. The old rubber boot too, does dreadful execution. The fierce work knows no respite till the last expiring flame is dashed out. The sacks are in shreds, the old boot is woefully scorched, but the victory is won!

The bright scene in the old north pasture is drawing to a close. The flaming lines are surrounding on all sides the little patch remaining. Smaller and smaller becomes the space; closer and closer the lines, suddenly the flames rush furiously together in fiery embrace. The eyes ache with the brightness. An instant, and all is over. Darkness, all the deeper for the bright flames of a moment ago, surrounds the four weary heroes as they trudge home across the "burnt."

D. N. LEHMER.

Evolution of the English Alphabet.

Man is the only being that uses a set of symbols to represent different sounds. There is nothing strange in the fact that the human race has a language, the geologist would say, that it is only one of the evidences of progress. Although it is impossible to trace uninterruptedly the line of advancement, it is interesting to consider how our present system of symbols was evolved.

The alphabet originated from a very primitive and crude accomplishment, the art of talking. Spoken language originated long before the written. What or who first used a sound to designate an object is unknown. As we have many words that by their sound signify the thing, sound-symbols may have first been used by analogy. A word with a mournful sound is used to represent the sad. The magnificent, the grand, the terrible, are made known by corresponding sounds. This far we see but little elevation above the brute. The dog

has the power, in a very marked way, to make known his feelings. But the human family was not content to give utterance to its feelings only, it wished to be able to represent all objects. To establish a single sound for each object was the first method employed. This meant as many sounds as objects. No wonder, that in that age there was so little visible progress, nor that the Chinese progress so slowly today.

After learning to talk, man began to put his thoughts into writing. By means of the hieroglyphics of the Egyptians and the stone carving of the American Indians, some of the first members of the human family endeavored to represent what they saw and heard. After the picture writing, came the advent of the alphabet. It is reasonable to suppose that it contained as many written symbols as there were sounds. What an inconceivably complex method of writing and talking this must have been! Civilization has, in general, brought about a great deal of complexity. But as a notable exception it has steadily simplified language. The first step toward simplifying language was made by the Phœnicians. They established a system of signs, that by different combinations, would represent every object and every feeling.

Our alphabet comes from the Latin, the Latin from the Greek, and that from the Phœnician. The origin of this last is unknown. It contained twenty-two symbols. How infinitely better is the set of twenty-two symbols than the system that requires a sign for every known object, or, even eighty-five, as the Hebrew. When we think how fast we can read, write, think or talk, and that every letter with its relations in the word, and every word in the sentence, and the meaning of the whole is impressed upon our minds, we are dazed. How grateful we should be to our ancestors that they have provided the means for reading and writing. To our alphabet we owe much of the improvement and progress we have made. The object now is, to limit the number of signs to the number of sounds. The same difficulty that is encountered in music is met with here. There are any number of combinations of vibrations, each combination producing a different sound. Hence, it is exceedingly difficult with the musical octave to represent all tones. The larynx is nothing more or less than a modified musical instrument. Therefore it is capable of producing a countless number of sounds. In most artificial instruments, these sounds are grouped together, those that differ most being the most prominent. Thus we obtain the octave. Our alphabet is the representative of our language as the octave is of the language of music. It, however, does not represent so correctly the human tones as the octave does the musical tones.

The alphabet of the English language is probably no more complex than the alphabets of other languages, yet, it is not so simple as it should be. How many of the brightest of the people of the United States never learn to spell correctly. The greatest fault and one that causes all this trouble lies in our alphabet. We have too many symbols for one sound, and too many sounds for one symbol. We have only seven sounds for the letter "a" and for some of these seven we have duplicates in the sounds of other letters. It becomes a matter of ridicule when we can describe the sound of one letter by the sound of another.

It will be one great step in advance for the English speaking people to break away from usage, and establish a new alphabet, and consequently, a new code of spelling. Let us complete what the Phœnicians commenced.

Almanacs were issued as early as 100 A. D.

Among the papers of the late Lord Lytton, were found a sufficient number of unpublished poems to make a small volume.