

Suspect Documents

THEIR SCIENTIFIC EXAMINATION

BY WILSON R. HARRISON, M.Sc.,
Ph.D. *Director, Home Office Forensic Science Laboratory,
Llanishen, Cardiff*

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The tremor which is characteristic of forgery is generally most apparent in the long curved strokes which form part of the capital letters and of the lower and upper loops of certain of the letters. for it is extremely difficult to make a slowly written accurate copy of a long curved stroke. The pen in the shaking hand of the unfit will produce tremor throughout the whole of the writing. Often no attempt will be made to write a smooth sweeping curve to the extended loops. instead. they will be represented in a genuine deteriorated handwriting by three or four short strokes to form a rough triangle or quadrilateral. with little or no attempt being made to round off the corners.

Sometimes the forger will consider that the tremulous signature he has written is too fluent in places to be likely to pass muster. in which case the obvious remedy. retouching. is applied. The presence of delicate retouching in an apparently tremulous signature is of course inexplicable on any grounds other than forgery. In general. it may be said that internal lack of consistency will expose the majority of forgeries of signatures written in a deteriorated handwriting.

Illegible Signatures

Sometimes a genuine signature written by someone who has lost practically all control of the pen will be found to be almost illegible. It might well be thought that nothing can be done to establish whether such a signature is either genuine or forged. but when an enlarged photograph of a genuine illegible "signature" is compared with that of a normal signature. written when the writer was in good health. it will generally be found possible to relate each fragment of the illegible signature with a formation found in the genuine specimen. When attempting this. it must be borne in mind that it is not uncommon for a writer in ill-health to miss out a whole syllable of his name. but as a rule it will be possible to discover what the writer has endeavoured to represent in every stroke he has succeeded in making.

In marked contrast. where the illegible matter is a forgery which purports to be an illegible signature. it is often impossible to correlate many of the strokes in this way. Not only is the forgery illegible. but it is devoid of either rhyme or reason. Furthermore. in a totally illegible signature. it is often possible to determine in which direction the majority of the strokes are written. and in this respect. the strokes will conform to the related structures in the normal signature. With a forgery. although similar strokes may be present. they will not necessarily have the same direction of writing as those they pretend to represent.

ORNATE

SIGNATURES

Some writers take pains to acquire a florid and ornate signature which displays a superabundance of unnecessary strokes and flourishes. *in* the hope that such a signature will be both distinctive and proof against forgery. Distinctive these signatures may be. but far from being difficult to forge. they are easy game for the forger with any pretension to a modicum of skill.

When these elaborate signatures are carelessly written. their essential letter formations are hidden under a mass of superfluous strokes. so that little *is* discernible save a vague "pictorial impression" of the signature as a whole. In

many instances. all that the forger has to do to make a most convincing forgery. *is* to construct a botch-potch of lines to form a whole which conveys to the mind a general impression similar to that of the genuine signature. Without a microscopic examination to determine the exact form and direction of writing of each stroke. no decision can be made concerning its authenticity. When this is done. these signatures have to be treated as illegible signatures.

A similar difficulty is experienced when the authorship of groups of initials *is* in dispute. Many people who write normally in other respects initial documents with a group of closely entwined. floridly written. capitals. Initials written in this way are easily forged. because all that the forger has to do is to reproduce the general outline of the group without being concerned *with* details. which would be the case if the initials were clearly and simply written. Suspect illegible groups of initials have to be treated as though they are illegible signatures. but here in the majority of cases the amount of evidence will be too limited to enable a decision to be made.

FORGERY-PROOF

SIGNATURES

The type of signature which is the *most* difficult to forge *is* not *that* which approximates to a florid and practically illegible scrawl. but one which *is* carefully and accurately written *with* shaded strokes. and in which every letter can be distinguished. To copy such a signature. the forger has first to master and be able *to* copy every stroke. which in itself is a mean task. and also ensure that the writing *is* fluent and not laboured. At the same time. he has to manipulate his pen so as to produce the same shading as the original signature. another matter of extreme difficulty. If he fails to do this at the same time as he *is* reproducing the outline of the letters. he *is* faced with a long and delicate retouching operation in which a single slip will ruin the whole of this work.

FORGERY OF POORLY WRITTEN SIGNATURES

In the foregoing treatment of the forged signature. *it* will be apparent throughout that the emphasis has been placed on the contrast between the laboured. tremulous and piecemeal written forgery. and the unconscious fluent handwriting of the genuine signature of the practised writer.

This might be termed the classical treatment of the subject of forged signatures. In the past. the document examiner was concerned mainly *with* signatures of this description. for it was rarely worth while attempting to forge the signatures of the poor and illiterate since there was little. -of, which they could be robbed by means of a successful forgery. The position is different today. Forgery. instead of being a comparatively rare offence on the grand scale. where large estates could be plundered if only a few signatures could be forged with sufficient skill to escape detection. has become both widespread and squalid. Nowadays. the poor and sick are regularly being cheated out of the small sums sent through the post to them by the Ministry of Health or the Ministry .of Pensions. etc. At the same time. Post Office Savings Bank accounts are daily being robbed. a few pounds at a time. by means of forged withdrawal forms used with stolen bank-books.