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THE SHAKESPEARE PROBLEM
RESTATED.

IN RE SHAKESPEARE
BEECHING v. GREENWOOD

THE VINDICATORS OF SHAKESPEARE

IS THERE A SHAKESPEARE
PROBLEM?

SIR SIDNEY LEE'S NEW EDN.
OF A LIFE OF WM. SHAKESPEARE

THE BODLEY HEAD

Printed by Fox, Jones & Co., High Street, Oxford.
Shaksper

No. 1. THE NAME SHAKSPERE AS PRINTED IN GERMAN
From the "Dresdner Anzeiger" of April 3, 1910

No. 2. THE FIRST WILL SIGNATURE

No. 3. THE "WALLACE" SIGNATURE

No. 4. THE THIRD WILL SIGNATURE
Shakspere's Handwriting
By Sir George Greenwood

LONDON: JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD, W.
NEW YORK: JOHN LANE COMPANY, MCMXX.
IAKSPERE’S HANDWRITING.

Everybody knows the saying, attributed to a certain judge of the mid-Victorian period, to the effect that the unveracious might be divided into “liars, damned liars, and expert witnesses.” This was, of course, a saying more jocular than judicial, but, like many exaggerated statement, it has, nevertheless, a substratum of truth. To illustrate, for example, the untrustworthiness of expert witnesses, I need only refer to a case which was tried at the Law Courts while I was practising at the Bar. At that time the two great “experts” whose services were constantly requisitioned in cases of disputed handwriting, were Messrs. Inglis & Netherclift, and, in the particular case referred to, one of these great men was engaged on behalf of the plaintiff and the other on behalf of the defendant. The trial took place before a Judge and Jury, when the two handwriting experts went into the box in support of their respective clients, and each, with equal positiveness, pledged his reputation in support of diametrically opposite opinions; whereupon the Judge directed the Jury that they should leave the “expert evidence” altogether out of consideration.

What are we to say then, when we find experts in high places—none other than the “paleographers” and “graphonomists” of the present day—differing widely among themselves? Are we to follow the example of the Judge and put the “expert evidence” altogether out of our consideration? That can hardly be done where the subject-matter for examination is one of such great literary importance as that of “Shakespeare’s handwriting,” and yet it is clear, when there is such difference of opinion among the learned, that we cannot adopt the advice of the school boy who translated “experto crede” by the words “trust the expert”! What, then, can the poor ordinary mortal do? He can only examine these different opinions, together with the subject-matter of the inquiry, and, making use of such reason, and judgment, and experience as he possesses, endeavour to arrive at a conclusion for himself.
SHAKSPERE'S HANDWRITING

Now at the present moment this absorbing question is agitating the minds of all Shakespearian scholars and students: Have we at last found one of Shakespeare's manuscripts, meaning thereby certain sheets of paper bearing words written by the same hand as that which wrote the six signatures which have hitherto been believed to be the only examples of Shakespeare's writing? That is, of course, an intensely interesting question. One of Shakespeare's manuscripts! A thing which everybody has longed for! What would not a lover of Shakespeare give to behold with his own eyes a page of Shakespeare's own undoubted writing! And if it can be proven that the sheets in question have been written on by the same hand as that which penned the signatures, then those poor deluded persons who doubt, nay, disbelieve, that Shakspeare of Stratford was indeed the author of the plays and poems of Shakespeare, are for ever put to silence. Obviously, therefore, every good and orthodox Shakespearian must ardently desire to believe, and to proclaim unto the world, that these pages are really and truly, and beyond a doubt, the longed-for Shakespearian manuscripts.

Now let me state the point at issue more definitely. There is, among the Harleian MSS. at the British Museum, an old manuscript play of "Sir Thomas More," the greater part of which is said to be in the handwriting of Anthony Munday. This work is something of an olla podrida. It is composed of twenty paper leaves, of which thirteen, we are told, are in Anthony Munday's autograph. "The rest (seven leaves, together with two small sheets originally pasted down to two pages of the original MS., but now lifted from them) are contributions by five different hands." ¹ Two of these leaves contain an "addition" which certain experts, or "paleographers," maintain to be in the same handwriting as that of the "Shakespeare" signatures. That is the question which I propose to examine, but before doing so I think it will be useful to consider the evidence which the handwriting experts generally have placed before the world concerning not only these and other signatures

purporting to be by Shakspere of Stratford, but also concerning the competence or otherwise of his father and mother in this matter of handwriting.

That John and Mary Shakspere, William's father and mother, both made use of marks in lieu of signatures is indisputable, supported as it is by documentary evidence. It was, accordingly, an accepted fact among reasonable men that, as Mr. Halliwell-Phillipps wrote of William Shakspere, "Both his parents were absolutely illiterate." That, however, did not satisfy some of the orthodox, who perceived that this fact somewhat helped the case of those who entertained doubts concerning the "Stratfordian" authorship of the plays and poems of Shakespeare. Thus Sir Sidney Lee wrote, in the illustrated Library Edition of his Life of William Shakespeare, published in 1899 (Preface, p. xii.): "The sceptics base their destructive criticism on few grounds that merit respect. The only position with the smallest pretensions to consideration which they have hitherto held rests on the assumption that Shakespeare's father and near kinsmen and kinswomen were illiterate and brainless peasants." I pause here to remark that this is an overstatement. "The sceptics" certainly made a point of the facts that neither Shakspere's father nor mother could write, and that some of their kinsmen and kinswomen, including their grand-daughters, Judith and Susanna, Shakspere's children, were similarly illiterate, but I am not aware that any "sceptic" has contended that any of these persons could be properly described as "brainless." In fact, this epithet seems to be gratuitously thrown in by Sir Sidney Lee in order to prejudice the "sceptical" case. Then Sir Sidney continues the passage I have quoted by the following important statement:—"Good ground is here offered for the belief that the poet's father wielded a practised pen." And, further, at p. 5 of the same edition, he wrote of Shakspere's father: "When attesting documents he occasionally made his mark, but there is evidence in the Stratford archives that he could write with facility."

1 See facsimiles of the marks of John and Mary Shakspere when they executed a deed in 1579, and of John Shakspere in 1584, in Halliwell-Phillipps' Outlines. Vol. I., pp. 38 and 40 (6th Edn., 1886). See also Vol. II., p. 13, for another facsimile of John Shakspere's mark.
Here, then, it seemed, was a remarkable thing indeed. Here was a man who "could write with facility," and yet who deliberately preferred to make his mark, not only "when attesting documents," but also when executing deeds! And that, too, in an age when to be able to write one's name was something to be proud of in a little provincial town, and in the class to which Shakspere's family belonged. Moreover, Mr. Halliwell-Phillipps had told us that persons who could write their names were not in the habit of appearing as "marksman," which, indeed, seemed to be a statement in full accordance with the probabilities of the case. "There is no reasonable pretense," wrote this distinguished Shakespearian authority, "for assuming that in the time of John Shakespeare, whatever might have been the case at earlier periods, it was the practice for marks to be used by those who were capable of signing their names. No instance of the kind has been discovered among the numerous records of his era that are preserved at Stratford-upon-Avon, while even a few rare examples in other districts, if such are to be found, would be insufficient to countenance a theory that he was able to write. All the known evidences point in the opposite direction, and it should be observed that in common with many other of his illiterate contemporaries he did not always adhere to the same kind of symbol, at one time contenting himself with a rudely-shaped cross, and at another delineating a fairly good representation of a pair of dividers."¹ In the face of all this Sir Sidney Lee told us of John Shakespeare that "when attesting documents he occasionally made his mark," thereby implying that generally he did not make his mark, but signed with his own handwriting.

It was noticed, however, that Sir Sidney did not indulge us with any examples from "the evidence in the Stratford archives" that John Shakespeare "could write with facility," or, indeed, at all. It was with great expectations, therefore, that we awaited the new edition of his Life of William Shakespeare, published in 1915, thinking to find there the desired proof of this interesting allegation. But, alas, we were doomed to disappointment. The promised proof has "melted into air, into thin air." We now read of John

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Shakespeare, "when attesting documents he, like many of his educated neighbours, made his mark, and there is no unquestioned specimen of his handwriting in the Stratford archives" (p. 6).

"Like many of his educated neighbours"! What is the meaning of this? Obviously the words are inserted in order to suggest that many "educated" persons of Stratford-upon-Avon, contemporary with John Shakspere, although they were able to write, and, doubtless, "with facility," yet preferred to use their "marks" in lieu of signatures, and, therefore, that it may be presumed that John Shakspere also was an "educated" person, who was wont to "attest documents" by a rough cross, or by the representation of a "pair of dividers," only because he preferred to do so; albeit there is "no unquestioned specimen of his handwriting in the Stratford archives," or anywhere else! But where is the evidence that any "educated" persons at Stratford or elsewhere at that time chose to substitute "marks" for the signatures which they were able to make? There is, I trow, no such evidence. In fact, the whole of this talk about John Shakspere's supposed ability to write is vain and profitless, and it is a relief to turn from such allegations, which seem to me not a little disingenuous, to Sir Edward Maunde Thompson's direct statement, viz.; "Neither of the poet's (i.e., Shakspere's) parents appears to have been able to write at all; they simply made their marks in execution of deeds."¹ Let us hope, then, that we shall now hear no more about the suggestion that John Shakspere was both a "marksman" and an educated man—*save the mark!*

Concerning William Shakspere's daughters there is no question at all. He who, according to the orthodox faith, wrote "There is no darkness but ignorance," left his second daughter entirely in that darkness, and his elder daughter was in very much the same case. "Of Shakspere's two surviving children," writes Sir E. Maunde Thompson, "the eldest, Susanna Hall, wrote a painfully formed signature, which was probably the most she was capable of doing with the pen; the second, Judith Quiney, we conclude, could not write at all, for she signed with a mark."²

² *Shakespeare's England*, *ubi supra*. 
SHAKSPERE’S HANDWRITING

So much, then, for William Shakespeare’s father, mother, and two daughters. They were all illiterate.¹ Let us now consider the case of William Shakspere himself.

Now there are said to be six authentic signatures of William Shakspere—one of them very much abbreviated—which are known to us. But not long ago there was yet another which was pronounced undoubtedly genuine by the most eminent “paleographer” of the time.

It may be well to say a word concerning it, for it shows, in a very interesting manner, how these “paleographers” and “graphonomists” are apt to differ amongst themselves. There is in the British Museum a copy of Florio’s translation of Montaigne’s Essays (1603) bearing the alleged autograph, “Willm Shakspere.” This was purchased for the Museum in 1837 by Sir Frederick Madden, then Keeper of the Manuscripts, for the sum of £140. Sir Frederick, who was the greatest authority of his day on ancient handwriting, vouched for the authenticity of this autograph, and Charles Knight, who gives a facsimile of it in his Pictorial Shakspere, pronounces it the “undoubted signature” of William Shakspere.² Sir Edward Maunde Thompson, however, who was Director and Principal Librarian of the British Museum from 1888 to 1909, has pronounced it an “undoubted forgery”! Here, then, is an instructive controversy. Here is a case of Inglis v. Netherclift once more. The most eminent paleographer of yesterday vouches for the authenticity of an alleged “Shakspere” signature, which he pronounces undoubtedly genuine, while the most eminent paleographer of to-day tells us that the same signature is an un-

¹ His only son had died in his twelfth year. Whether he had any education or not is not known.

² Knight’s Pictorial Shakspere (Virtue & Co.), Comedies, Vol. I., p. 3 and p. 78. It is remarkable that Dr. Charles William Wallace speaks of this copy of Florio’s Montaigne’s Essays as bearing on the flyleaf the name “William Shakespeare” (sic)! He says the authenticity of the signature “is still an open question.” See Harper’s Magazine, March, 1910, p. 504. Mr. Israel Gollancz also in his preface to The Tempeast (“Temple Classics” Edition), states that “Shakespeare’s own copy of this work (Florio’s Montaigne), with his autograph, is among the treasures of the British Museum.”
doubted forgery! Which of the two are we to believe? We are told to trust to "authority." But when "authority" is divided against itself, what are we to do? Have we any course open to us, as reasonable men, but to decide for ourselves according to the best of our judgment?

But we have yet another little difference between "paleographers" and "graphonomists" to notice. The American Professor, Charles William Wallace, Ph.D., who obtained such notoriety by his New Shakespeare Discoveries, writes as follows concerning Shakespeare's signatures: "One other signature deserves to be added to this list. It is the abbreviated 'Wm. Sh*' in a copy of Ovid's Metamorphoses, now owned by the Bodleian Library. On the cover page fronting the signature is the statement, 'This little Booke of Ovid was given to me by W. Hall who sayd it was once Will: Shakspers TN 1682.'... The recipient's memorandum of presentation in 1682 is unanimously agreed to be genuine. It has been questioned whether some of the numerous forgers, seeing that, had not forged Shakespeare's signature to fit the notice. But all paleographers who have examined it declare it genuine." ¹

Alas, what says Sir E. Maunde Thompson? After dismissing the signature in Florio's Montaigne as a forgery, he proceeds, "Nor is it possible to give a higher character to the signature ('Wm. Sh*') in the Aldine Ovid's Metamorphoses, 1502, in the Bodleian Library. This again is a forgery." ² So much for Professor Wallace's, "All paleographers who have examined it! And Professor Wallace himself is, I believe, a "paleographer" or "graphonomist"! All this is perplexing to the poor anxious inquirer who can aspire to neither of these high-sounding epithets.

¹ Harper's Magazine, ubi supra, pp. 504, 505. (My italics).
² See Shakespeare's England, Vol. I., p. 308, note. Sir Sidney Lee says of this very abbreviated signature that "experts have declared, on grounds which deserve attention," that it is "a genuine autograph of the poet" (Life of William Shakespeare. 1915, p. 21). How the "experts" could undertake to say this, unless guided by divine inspiration, it is difficult to guess, for, obviously, an "expert" forger would have had little difficulty in writing "Wm. Sh*" in such a way as to deceive the very elect, especially as the strong inclination of all the faithful would be to believe in its authenticy.
And now let us come to William Shakspere's own signatures, assuming that such indeed they be. Let us take them in order of date, omitting, however, for the moment the very abbreviated signature discovered by Professor Wallace.

(1) In the Guildhall Library is a deed by which one Henry Walker conveyed a house in Blackfriars to "William Shakespeare" and Trustees. This deed bears date March 10th, 1613. It is signed, if we are to trust the paleographers, "William Shakspër," though it requires a very strong microscope to find the "r," which Sir Edward Maunde Thompson tells us was added as "an after thought." 1

(2) In the British Museum is a mortgage-deed of the same property, bearing date March 11th, 1613, and signed "Wm. Shakspê," according to the same high authority.

Now in each of these two deeds Shakspere has placed his signature on the parchment label to which the seal is attached. "It is evident," writes Sir E. Maunde Thompson, "that he imagined, as a layman might imagine, that he was obliged, in each case, to confine his signature within the bounds of the parchment label which is inserted in the foot of the deed to carry the seal, and not to allow it to run over on to the parchment of the deed itself." This may, of course, be the true explanation, though it is not a little difficult to conceive that "Shakespeare," who had so much knowledge of law and legal procedure, should, in the year 1613, have laboured

1 *Shakespeare's Handwriting.* p. 6. Since this was in type I have, through the courtesy of the Guildhall Librarian, examined the original signature very closely, and I confidently assert there is no "r" in it, microscopic or otherwise. There is, indeed, a tiny ink mark just on the edge of the tab, after the "e," and if anyone chooses to say that the signatory intended to add an "r," whether as "an afterthought" or otherwise, he is of course at liberty to do so, but there is no evidence of it. Some distance above the "e" there is a very faint, wavy line, which Sir E. Maunde Thompson (p. 4), denotes by a straight line just above the "e," which it certainly is not, though it may possibly be intended for a mark of abbreviation. The signature is *not* "Shaksper," but "Shakspe." If any reader doubts this let him examine the signature for himself in the Guildhall Library. But the matter does not seem to me of much importance. It is clear anyhow that the signatory had no thought of writing "Shakespeare."
under such a delusion! Moreover, the essentials to the validity of a deed are sealing and delivery, so that it was not really necessary for Shakspere to sign at all, either the Purchase Deed or the Mortgage, and, as a fact, the deeds themselves do not purport to be signed, but only to have been "sealed and delivered," as the practice was, and as the law required.

There is, however, a rather important fact to be borne in mind with regard to the sealing of these deeds. Shakspere had, apparently, no seal of his own, neither, indeed, had William Johnson, who, as one of Shakspere's "nominal partners or trustees," as Sir Sidney Lee calls them, also executed both the purchase-deed and the mortgage; wherefore the seal of Henry Lawrence, clerk to Robert Andrews, the law scriviner, who drew the deeds and who was one of the witnesses, was made use of to supply the deficiency in both cases. But this seal bore the initials of Henry Lawrence. "The great dramatist," writes Mr. Halliwell-Phillipps, "to the disappointment of posterity, impressed the wax of both his labels with the initials H.L. instead of those of his own name." What was there, then, to identify this seal as Shakspere's seal pro hac vice if he had not signed his name above it? It is possible, therefore, that he imagined the seal and the label to which it was attached to be so much one that he ought to confine his signature to the latter, though, I repeat, it seems passing strange that the signatory, if he was indeed "the great dramatist," who had such wide knowledge of law and legal practice, should have such an idea in his mind!

In the case of William Johnson, who also made use of Henry Lawrence's seal, and who similarly confined his signature (which identified this same seal as his also for the purposes of the deed)

1 Further, there was a lawyer present, or, at any rate, the scrivener who drew up the deeds, and was there to attest them, and who would be able to instruct Shakspere as to where his signature should be, as is done at the present time.


within the limits of the label, it is not so strange, for he was but a vintner. On the other hand, John Jackson, who signed the deed, but did not seal it, wrote his name freely across the label, some letters of his signature appearing on the parchment on each side thereof.

But, after all, there seems to be very little point in all this discussion concerning the confinement of Shaksper's signature to the tab above the seal. It appears to have been a very general custom so to confine the signature, though it was not legally necessary so to do, and nothing, I think, can be fairly argued from the fact that Shaksper followed that custom.¹

With regard to the mortgage signature, Sir E. Maunde Thompson writes as follows: "No doubt, having in his mind the difficulty he had had on the previous day in keeping strictly to the label of the purchase deed, he [Shakspere] now made sure of not transgressing by forming each of the letters of his surname deliberately and separately (except the a and k, which are linked) and by modifying their shapes from the usual cursive to a restrained and formally set character."

Now that the real reason for the difference of the handwriting in the signature of the mortgage deed from that of the signature to the purchase deed was due to the alleged fact that Shakspere had in his mind the difficulty he had had in confining his signature to the label of the purchase deed, appears to me an altogether doubtful proposition, but, however that may be, it is, I venture to say, extremely improbable that there was any "previous day," as Sir E. Maunde Thompson assumes. In other words, I have little or no doubt that the conveyance and the mortgage were executed on the same day.

We must remember that Shakespere left nearly half the purchase money of the house on mortgage. Now what is the practice when the vendor of a house agrees to accept part of the purchase money

¹ Possibly it might be in a witness's mind that if the seal were to be cut away from the deed at any time, his name, if his signature were confined to the label, would go with it.
in cash and to leave the rest on mortgage? Naturally, the vendor is not content to execute the conveyance of his property and to hand it to the purchaser's solicitor, until he has received not only that part of the purchase money that is to be paid in cash, but also the mortgage deed duly executed by the purchaser. The vendor therefore executes the conveyance and hands it to his solicitor, only to come into effect when the purchaser has fulfilled these conditions. The purchaser then executes the mortgage, and it is dated one day after the conveyance. It is then handed to the vendor's solicitor, together with the cash due, and not till then does the purchaser's solicitor receive the conveyance. The purchaser must, of course, have had the house, or land, conveyed to him before he is in a position to mortgage it, wherefore the conveyance is dated one day prior to the mortgage, but as a fact both conveyance and mortgage are executed on the same day. That is the common practice at the present time, and I apprehend it was the practice in Shakespeare's time also. If so—and we can hardly doubt that it was so—these two peculiar signatures were written on the same day.

Moreover, even apart from the fact that the practice is as I have described it, is it not a priori improbable that the parties should have taken the trouble and incurred the expense of meeting on one day to execute the conveyance, and on the next to execute a mortgage of the same property, when both transactions might so easily have been done at one sitting?

Mr. Halliwell-Phillipps, I may add, was, of course, aware of the practice in these cases. He writes, concerning the Blackfriars house, "The conveyance deeds of this house bear the date of March the 10th, 1613, but in all probability they were not executed until the following day and at the same time that the mortgage was effected." ¹

¹ Work cited, ubi supra. The original deed of conveyance prepared for the purchaser, which was in the Halliwell-Phillipps' collection, was sold in 1897 to a gentleman in America. This deed was sealed only by Shakspere. The counterpart, signed and sealed by Shakspere, and prepared for the vendor, is the document which is in the Guildhall Library.
And now let the reader examine these two signatures more closely. As Sir E. Maunde Thompson points out, there is a great difference between them, so much so, indeed, that some critics have found it difficult to believe that they could have been written by the same man on two consecutive days, and still more difficult to believe that they could have been written by the same man on the same day. It is true that the name "Shakspere," or, rather, the abbreviation of it, is commenced with the same German or old English "S" which was in such common use at that period, and which Shakspere, if we may judge from the signatures which are said to be his, habitually made use of,¹ and the small s is very much the same in both, but here the resemblance between the two may, I think, be said to cease. It is characteristic of the "orthodox" methods of Shakespearian controversy that the late Dean Beeching, who particularly called attention to "the differences in the h, the a, and the p" in the two signatures, actually found an argument in support of the "Stratfordian" authorship in this curious difference. "I point out," he wrote, "that on two consecutive days he [Shakspere] signed his name in two different scripts, and I suggest the inference that the Stratford player who signed these documents was also the dramatist, because we know from manuscripts of plays still extant in the British Museum, that dramatists employed two scripts, one for the text, and one for the stage directions."² This is, indeed, an argumentative gem of purest ray serene. But would any reasoning man make use of such an argument apart from Shakespearian controversy? The idea that Shakspere used his "text" script for his conveyance, and his "stage directions" text for his mortgage is really quite delightful in its absurdity. But the learned Dean was altogether wrong. The signatures do, indeed, differ widely, but they are not in different scripts. They are both in the same old English or (so-called) Gothic script.

Let us now consider the three Will signatures. The Will is in three sheets of paper, and each sheet bears a signature. On the first the writing has now become so indistinct that even Solomon

¹ For facsimile of the name "Shakspere" as printed by a modern German newspaper see frontispiece.

in all his glory could make nothing of it. As Sir Sidney Lee writes: "The ink of the first signature ... has now faded beyond recognition, but that it was 'Shakspere' may be inferred from the facsimile made by George Steevens in 1776," and there seems to be now no dispute that this first Will signature should be so read, viz., as "William Shakspere."" As to the second and third signatures, Sir Sidney Lee writes that these "which are easier to decipher, have been variously read as 'Shakspere,' 'Shakspeare,' and 'Shakespeare,'" which shows that though "easier to decipher," they nevertheless present no little difficulty, and, according to Sir Sidney, leave the reader a very generous latitude of choice. Now that eminent and very acute Shakespearian scholar, Edmund Malone, who had the advantage of inspecting the signatures when the ink was fresher by some 120 years than it is now, came to the conclusion that in these Will signatures, "certainly the letter a is not to be found in the second syllable"; in fact, he read them all as "Shakspere."" Sir Frederic Madden, whom Dr. Ingleby cites as "the most accomplished paleographic expert of his day," came to the same conclusion, as did also Dr. Ingleby himself. Mr. James Spedding says that Shakspere never, in any known case, wrote his name "Shakespeare," and Dr. Furnivall agreed that "Shakspere" was the proper reading of the name. Yet, notwithstanding all this consensus of paleographic opinion, Sir E. Maunde Thompson, though he agrees in reading the second Will signature as "Willm Shakspere," maintains that the third is "William Shakespeare," thus affording us yet another illustration of the manner in which handwriting experts are wont to differ among themselves, and yet another warning of the risks we run if we blindly put our trust in them. For why must Sir E. Maunde Thompson of this generation


2 See Boswell's Malone (1821). Vol. II., p. 1., note. Malone wrote: "I suspect that what was formerly supposed to be the letter a over his autograph was only a coarse and broad mark of contraction."

3 "We contend," he writes, "that the two last signatures of the Will are not 'Shakespeare,' but, like Malone's tracing of the first (now partly obliterated), 'Shakspere.'"
be necessarily a better or more trustworthy paleographer than was Sir F. Madden of the last? 1

Now it is certainly a remarkable thing, making all allowance for the fluidity of the spelling in the early days of the seventeenth century, that a man should spell his name in two different ways on the same document, and that document his Will, the most solemn document of all. Sir E. Maunde Thompson is constrained to recognise this. "It is a fact," he writes, "that people in Shakespeare's days were not always consistent in spelling their own names; but it is curious that two differently spelt subscriptions should have been attached to one and the same document." And how does he attempt to explain it? "The lapse," he says, "may be fairly ascribed to the testator's bodily condition, or it may even be taken as evidence that he was so accustomed to sign his surname in a shortened form that, when he had to expand it, he was indifferent to the manner of spelling the ending."

I will leave the second explanation to the consideration of any intelligent reader. But what of "the testator's bodily condition"? Sir E. Maunde Thompson writes that "at the date of the execution of the Will he [Shakspere] was sorely stricken; of this the imperfections in the handwriting of the signatures afford ample evidence."

The argument seems to be this. If Shakespeare had not been very ill he would never have written so badly as he did. But he did write very badly. Therefore, he must have been very ill. But really it is quite possible that Shakspere's handwriting may have been very defective even when he was in good health. Certainly the signatures to the conveyance and the mortgage do not negative such a belief. And what evidence is there that Shakspere really

1 Dr. Wallace also, in spite of the opinion of the other experts, reads the third signature "Shakspeare." He agrees, however, in reading the first and second as "Shakspere." Nevertheless, Dean Beeching characteristically wrote, "On the Will the final signature is unmistakably 'speare,'" and adds, "I have Dr. E. T. L. Scott's authority for saying that the second also has the a." So that here we have Dr. Wallace, who is nothing if not a "paleographer," brought into direct conflict with Dr. E. T. L. Scott, as well as with Sir E. Maunde Thompson! Would it not be wise to adopt the advice of the learned Judge and to dismiss the "expert evidence" from our minds altogether?
was "sorely stricken" when he signed his Will? The Will was originally dated the 25th January, 1615–16. In it the testator is stated to be "in perfect health," but we will make no point of that, for it may be no more than common form, or Shakspere may, of course, have become very ill before he signed it on the 25th of March. But Shakspere lived for nearly a month after this, for he did not die till April 23rd, and there is really no reason to suppose—at any rate, there is no warrant for assuming as an undoubted fact—that he was so ill on the 25th of March that he was unable to write in his usual way. It appears to me that the assertion that he was "sorely stricken" at the time is only a hypothesis, convenient for those who assume that Shakspere must, at other times, have been able to write much better than he did when he signed his will. "It is not necessary," writes Mr. Halliwell-Phillipps, "to follow the general opinion that the signatures betray the tremulous hand of illness, although portions of them may indicate that they were written from an inconvenient position." ¹ The illness hypothesis is, indeed, mere assumption, as this critic perceived.

It is, however, sometimes urged as evidence that Shakspere was in a critical state when he signed his Will, that the draft Will was made use of, "without waiting for the fair engrossment," as Sir E. Maunde Thompson writes. There is very little force in this argument. In Shakspere’s time a Will was not a document for which many solemn formalities were required by law. So far was this from being the case that a Will in those days was not even required to be signed at all. A Will of personality might even have been verbal (or "nuncupative," as it was called) if made by a testator in extremis before witnesses and afterwards reduced to writing. For written Wills of personality no witnesses were required, and if the Will was written in the testator’s hand, though neither signed nor sealed, and though there were no witnesses present, it was good on proof of the handwriting. Even if the Will were in another man’s hand, and not signed by the testator, it was good on proof that the writing was with the testator’s privity and direction. Wills of land were required to be in writing, but it was sufficient if the Will was put in writing by the testator, or another with his privity and

direction, without any other execution. So, too, if notes were taken by the testator for his Will, and it was reduced into form pursuant to such instructions in his life, though it was never read or shown to him, it was sufficient. No particular form was required for a Will. Thus notes or memoranda written from the testators' mouth by a physician or scrivener were good if afterwards executed.¹

So little formalities, then, were required for a Will that there seems to be no reason to suppose that Shakspere would have thought it necessary to go to the expense of having a fair copy made of the very carefully prepared and well-written draft which had been made for him by Francis Collyns the solicitor. It was amply sufficient for his purpose.²

There is yet another fact with regard to the Will signatures which excites our astonishment. As the signature to the conveyance differs from the signature to the mortgage, so also do the three Will signatures differ among themselves. "The three subscriptions," writes Sir E. Maunde Thompson, "present difficulties which are almost beyond explanation. In the first place, they differ from one another to such a degree that it is not going too far to declare that, were they met with on three independent documents, they might not unreasonably be taken, at first sight, for the signatures of three different persons. And, besides their intrinsic dissimilarity, the methods of writing them vary also."³

Let us now, before passing on to the "Wallace" signature, consider Shakspere's handwriting as a whole. This is how Sir Sidney Lee speaks of it: "As was customary in provincial schools, the poet learned to write the "Old English" character, which resembles that still in vogue in Germany. He was never taught the Italian script, which was winning its way in cultured society, and is now universal among Englishmen. Until his

¹ See, amongst other authorities, Comyn's Digest, Estates by Devise, D. 1 and E. 1.

² Through the kindness of Messrs. Sampson Low & Marston, I possess an excellent photographic reproduction of Shakspere's Will, taken by permission of the Judge of the Probate Court in 1864. It shows very clearly how carefully the draft was prepared, notwithstanding the interlineations.

death, Shakespeare's 'Old English' handwriting testified to his provincial education."¹

And again, "In all the authentic signatures Shakespeare used the old 'English' mode of writing, which resembles that still in vogue in Germany. During the seventeenth century the old 'English' character was finally displaced in England by the 'Italian' character, which is now universal in England and in all English-speaking countries. In Shakespeare's day highly-educated men, who were graduates of the Universities and had travelled abroad in youth, were capable of writing both the old 'English' and the 'Italian' character with equal facility. As a rule, they employed the 'English' character in their ordinary correspondence, but signed their names in the 'Italian' hand. Shakespeare's exclusive use of the 'English' script was doubtless a result of his provincial education. He learnt only the 'English' character at school at Stratford-on-Avon, and he never troubled to exchange it for the more fashionable 'Italian' character in later life."²

According to Sir Sidney Lee, therefore, "Shakespeare" was not "highly educated," had not travelled abroad, and took no trouble about his handwriting. It will be observed also that, according to Sir Sidney, those who could write the "English" and "Italian" hands with equal facility as a rule employed the "English" character in their correspondence but signed their names in the "Italian" hand. Messrs. Garnett & Gosse, however, in their Illustrated English Literature, make a suggestion eminently characteristic of the methods of Shakespearian biography. They

¹ A Life of William Shakespeare (1915), p. 16. Sir Sidney assumes, of course, that Shakspere was for some few years at the Stratford Free School. Mr. Halliwell-Phillipps thought it necessary that a boy should learn to write before admission to the school. He says: "Although his parents were absolutely illiterate, they had the sagacity to appreciate the importance of an education for their son, and the poet, somehow or other, was taught to read and write, the necessary preliminaries to admission into the Free School." (Outlines, 6th Edn., Vol. I.) He, too, assumes that Shakspere went to the Free School. See also English Schools at the Reformation. By A. F. Leach, p. 105.

are not satisfied to believe that "Shakespeare" could only write
the old German hand, so they put forward a novel and ingenious
hypothesis. "All the undoubted autographs of Shakespeare," they write, "appear on legal documents and are written in the hand
appropriate to business matters. This affords no proof that he could
not write the Italian script if he thought fit." ¹ While, therefore,
according to Sir Sidney Lee, those persons who could write both
scripts were accustomed to sign their names in the "Italian" hand,
according to Messrs. Garnett & Gosse, Shakspere, although
he could write the "Italian" hand "if he thought fit," chose to
use the Old English for his signatures! At any rate, they put this
forward as a not unreasonable hypothesis, but as no instance can
be found of a man of the time who could write both scripts making
a choice such as suggested, and as there is not a scintilla of evidence
that Shakspere could write the "Italian" hand, and, indeed, nothing whatever to make us think that he could do so, but every-
thing to make us think the contrary, this ridiculous suggestion may
be said to have perished still-born.

But what an extraordinary thing that the author of the plays
and poems of Shakespeare should not have learnt to write the
"Italian" script! That, as Sir Sidney Lee tells us, he should not
have "taken the trouble" to do so! Yet Shakespeare well knew
the value of the art of good handwriting. For what says Hamlet? :

I sat me down;
Devised a new commission; wrote it fair:
I once did hold it, as our statists do,
A baseness to write fair, and labour'd much
How to forget that learning: But, sir, now
It did me yeoman's service.

Aye, and the author of Twelfth Night must have known the value
of that "Italian" hand, which was at that time rapidly "winning
its way in cultured society"; for does he not make Malvolio say,
with reference to Olivia's supposed letter, "I think we do know
the sweet Roman hand"? Yet we are told that he, the dramatist,
did not know it? Is that credible? It is indeed hard to think
so.

¹ English Literature: An Illustrated Record. Vol. II., p. 195.
"If Shakespeare," says a reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement* of August 17th, 1916, "had only signed his name six times less often than he did, we might have been able to speculate happily on the part he should have taken in spreading the new accomplishment. Passages, headed by the phrase of Malvolio's just quoted, would have been collected from his works to prove his mastery of the art; Hamlet's account of the forgery which he substituted for his own death-warrant, would have been easily conclusive. Moreover, there is evidence in the script both of Pembroke and of Southampton; both signed in the italic style, so that either of the two might have picked it up from the manuscript of the Sonnets. But it happened that on six of the occasions when Shakespeare wrote his name he gave away the fact once for all that he did not use the Roman hand himself. Six of his signatures still confront us; strange, uncomely scrawls, as of a man who had never known the air of the awakening world, never felt the influences which had breathed so freely upon Portia and Olivia, upon Biron and Benedick. We, his countrymen, with difficulty identify the separate letters of his name. The thought goes far to reconcile one to the annihilation of all the rest of his manuscript. . . . As for these six tracings of Shakespeare's pen, Sir Edward Maunde Thompson treats them with royal ceremony, analyses them down to the last turn of the quill, and bends a divining eye upon the firmness of one stroke and shakiness of another. His inferences are ingenious; yet the quill, one feels, was not the key with which Shakespeare unlocked his heart."

The last sentence is indeed true, if by "Shakespeare" we are to understand William Shakspere of Stratford.

I now come to examine the sixth "Shakespeare" signature (so called), viz.: the very much abbreviated signature attached to the deposition of May 11th, 1612, made by Shakspere in the case of "Bellott v. Montjoy," heard in the Court of Requests and discovered by Dr. C. W. Wallace in the Public Record Office. Sir E. Maunde Thompson attaches great importance to this signature. "By means of this signature," he says, "written with a free hand, we now know

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1 See frontispiece for facsimile.
that Shakespeare was capable of writing in fluent style, and we recover the key of this leading factor of the problem."¹ And again, "Written carelessly but with remarkable freedom and facility the letters are WILLM SHAKP—with a long horizontal stroke passing through the stem of the ρ, indicating abbreviation. It is notable that the medial s of the surname is omitted, as though the writer thought the letter negligible, provided he gave the emphatic ρ; unless, indeed, in his hurry he accidentally left it out. We might almost imagine that, having dropped the unfortunate blot of ink on the k, in his confusion he hastened to finish the signature without giving a thought to the necessary s. The ρ with the crossed stem would, according to the usual laws of abbreviated symbols, be interpreted as equivalent to per, and of course Shakespeare knew the literal value of this common symbol; but it is quite possible that he used the stem-cross merely as a general sign of abbreviation of the ending of his name without intending it to represent any particular spelling, whether per, pere, or peare.²

Now here again is perplexity for the poor ordinary mortal. Sir E. Maunde Thompson, the great paleographer, reads this signature, written with such "remarkable freedom and facility," as "Willm Shakp," and he tells us that there is much virtue in "the ρ with the crossed stem." But Dr. Wallace, who discovered the signature, and who is nothing if not a paleographer, has told us that the "signature" does not contain a ρ at all. It is "Willm Shaks."³ In which of these great men, then, ought we to put our trust? A priori it would seem very improbable that Shakspeare would omit "the medial s" of his name. "SHAKP" is certainly a very curious and not at all euphonious abbreviation for "Shakspare"! But Sir E. Maunde Thompson tells us that this is what the so-called

¹ Work cited, p. 1.
² Ibid., p. 8. I would ask the reader to examine the facsimile of this signature carefully and ask himself how much of all this is justified. Is the last letter really a ρ "with a long horizontal stroke passing through the stem, indicating abbreviation"? Are the letters s and k written with "facility," or, rather, with such "freedom" that they are difficult for anyone but a paleographer to find?
signature amounts to, and, as we have seen, he thinks Shakspere thought the s was of no consequence "provided he gave the emphatic p." But it is, indeed, a sad thing to find that this very important though very much curtailed signature, "this specimen of Shakespeare's calligraphy as a signature," as Sir E. Maunde Thompson calls it, and which, according to him, gives us "the key of this leading factor of the problem" (whatever that may mean), and whose "value for gauging his capacity for dexterity with his pen can hardly be placed too high," is, nevertheless, so written (I must not, of course, say "badly written") that it is read in one way by one eminent paleographer, and in a different way by another eminent paleographer. For how can it be a "key" for us, and a certain guide, if these highly-distinguished experts differ as to the way in which it is to be read?

As to the letters a and k in this much lauded "specimen of Shakespeare's calligraphy," their demonstration must be left to the graphonomists. To the ordinary mortal they seem to be indeed fearfully and wonderfully made.

"It is said by Shakespeare's enemies," writes Dr. Wallace, "that he was an ignoramus who could not write his name legibly. The fault, however, lies not in him, but in themselves. Familiarity with contemporary script would reverse the conclusion."

By "Shakespeare's enemies" Dr. Wallace, of course, means those lovers of Shakespeare who are convinced, on what appears to them quite sufficient grounds, that the works which they so greatly love and admire were not written by the Stratford player. But let that pass. I may note, however, in passing, that the assumption that those who take this heretical view necessarily believe that Shakspere of Stratford was an "ignoramus" is an unfounded one. In all probability he spent a few years at the Free School, as Rowe informs us. Let that pass also. But what of the "legibility" of his signatures? We have seen how the experts have disputed, and are at variance, with regard to the Will signatures. And here we have the same difference in regard to his newly-discovered, and, we are told, all-important signature. How, then, can it be said that Shakspere wrote his name legibly if even the paleographers read it in different ways? ¹
A writer of an article on "Seekers after Shakespeare," in The Times Literary Supplement, writes as follows upon this matter:—"We pry into watermarks, and are greatly cheered by a new autograph signature, illegible, it is true, to all except those few who are familiarly conversant with the apparently paralytic handwriting of the period."—(April 21st, 1910). This, I trow, was not written by one of "Shakespeare’s enemies"! The writer, however, is wrong in speaking of the "paralytic handwriting of the period." There was no lack of beautiful handwriting at that time, whether of the Old English or the new Italian script. As to the latter, one has only to turn to the writing of Ben Johnson, and Joshua Sylvester, and Spenser, and Sidney, and Francis Bacon, and many others whom one might name, to find excellent examples, nor would one have any difficulty to find such among writers in the old Gothic script. But if the writer had spoken of Shakspere’s "paralytic handwriting" he would, I think have found few, except Dr. Wallace, and certain other paleographers, to disagree with him.

But Dr. Wallace is, certainly, very far from being a trustworthy guide. We have seen how he has pronounced that the so-called signature "Wm. Sh" in the Bodleian copy of Ovid’s Metamorphoses (1502) which Sir E. Maunde Thompson has pronounced to be an undoubted forgery, is undoubtedly a genuine "Shakespeare" signature. Let us now consider the reasoning by which he considers that the case for this "signature" is established beyond all doubt.

1 One of Dr. Wallace’s own countrymen, Dr. Mellen Chamberlain, once a recognized authority, I believe, as a "paleographer," and for some time Librarian of the Boston (U.S.A.) Public Library, wrote concerning an alleged "Shakespeare" signature that "the field of comparison...is narrow, being limited to those written between 1613 and 1616, all of which show such a lack of facility in handwriting as would almost preclude the possibility of Shakespeare’s having written the dramas attributed to him, so great is the apparent illiteracy of the signatures." (See my In re Shakespeare, John Lane, 1919, p. 22). Moreover, referring to the copyist of the great dramatist’s supposed manuscript, Sir Sidney Lee, in his Introduction to the Folio facsimile (p. xviii.), says that "he was not always happy in deciphering the original, especially when the dramatist wrote so illegibly as Shakespeare." It seems, then, that some of the "paleographists" authorities do not agree with Dr. Wallace as to the "legibility" of "Shakespeare’s" handwriting.
SHAKSPERE'S HANDWRITING

"The only difficulty that remained," he writes, "was the fact that no known authentic signature by Shakespeare was abbreviated. The present documents [to wit, the documents in the case of "Bellott v. Mountjoy," which have brought to light the "signature" which Dr. Wallace reads "Willm Shaks" and Sir E. Maunde Thompson reads "Willm Shakp"] furnish one. This, added to previous evidence, makes the proof of genuineness conclusive. Shakespeare undoubtedly used this well-worn copy of the Metamorphoses and wrote his name in it . . . some time near the close of his life." 1

This is, indeed a magnificent example of expert "Stratfordian" ratiocination, and furnishes us with an illuminating illustration of what an "orthodox" Professor considers to be evidence. There is a book with "Wm. Shôte." inscribed in it, nobody knows when or by whom. This very abbreviated signature might, possibly, have been written by Shakespeare, or it might have been written by somebody else. But no other abbreviated signature by "Shakespeare" could be produced. At length one is discovered written "Willm Shaks" or "Willm Shakp." (You pay your money and you take your choice). Eureka! cries Professor Wallace; the matter is settled. "Willm Shaks" is conclusive evidence in favour of "Wm. Shôte." How could it be possible for a forger to have written "Wm. Shôte." seeing that Shakspere, on one occasion at least, wrote "Willm Shaks"?

I really think that if my old friend, Judge Pitt-Taylor, had been alive he would have found himself constrained to bring out a new edition of his Law of Evidence!

So much for the "Wm. Shôte." signature. We have already seen that Dr. Wallace not only pins his faith to the "Florio's Montaigne" signature also, but was under the impression that that signature was "William Shakespeare," whereas, in truth and in fact, it is "Willm Shakspere!"

But the crowning absurdity of all remains to be mentioned. Shakspere, it seems, at one time lodged with one Mountjoy, or Montjoy, a wig-maker in Mugwell (or Monkwell) Street. And what resulted from that important fact? Why Shakspere, according to the imaginative Professor Wallace, "honours his host by raising

1 Harper's Magazine, ubi supra, p. 504.
him in the play [Henry V.] to the dignity of a French Herald under his own name of Montjoy!" 1 What clearer proof could be required that William Shakspere of Stratford was the author of Henry V.? Where else could he have found the name of Montjoy?

Alas, it appears that this learned Professor, and expert paleographer, had never read Holinshed's account of the Battle of Agincourt! For had he done so he must have known that "Montjoy, King at Arms," was the official name of a French Herald, just as "Clarenceux King at Arms" is the official name of one of our English Heralds, and that Shakespeare, very naturally, took Montjoy, the French Herald, direct from the pages of Holinshed! Solventur risu tabulae.

Let us now consider what appears to me a very remarkable piece of ratiocination on the part of Sir E. Maunde Thompson himself. With reference to the "addition" to the play of "Sir Thomas More," which it is sought to prove is in the handwriting of Shakspere of Stratford, he writes as follows:—"There is little room for doubt that the names of the characters of the play were written in the margins of the pages after the text had been composed. The perfunctory manner in which they are scribbled, and the abbreviation of many of them, increasing in brevity as they proceed, seem to prove this. On the first page 'Lincolne' diminishes successively to 'Lincs,' 'Linc,' 'Lin.' 'Other,' meaning anyone whose name the reviser may choose to insert, runs down to 'oth,' and at last dwindles to solitary 'o.' Even in the case of the leading character, More, although he gets his full name 'Moor,' in most instances, yet it is omitted altogether from the speech at the end of the second page and has to be supplied by the reviser. And what can be more ludicrous than the reduction of the name to bovine 'Moo,' attached to the long speech on the third page, for lack of a scratch of the pen to add the harmless necessary r? In the face of these indications of carelessness, we might almost say boredom, on the part of Shakspere in the matter of vain repetitions, we begin to experience an abatement in our wonder that he shirked signing his name in full if he could invent any excuse for cutting it short." 2

1 Harper's Magazine, ubi supra, p. 507.
2 Shakespeare's Handwriting. p. 56. (Italics mine.)
SHAKSPERE’S HANDWRITING

Here we first note that "Shakespeare" (meaning thereby William Shakspere of Stratford) is quietly assumed to have been the writer of this "addition," which is the very point at issue. Then the fact that the playwright (assumed to be Shakespeare) dashed in on the margin "the names of the characters of the play" (viz.: of this additional part thereof) in very abbreviated forms, is held to be an indication of "carelessness," if not "boredom," in view of which we need no longer wonder that "Shakespeare" was in the habit of cutting short his own signature!

Well, I must speak with all respect of an octogenarian scholar, who was once the Director of the British Museum, but really reasoning of this sort seems hardly worthy of this learned paleographer. Does not everybody know that a playwright is not so foolish as to waste his time by writing the names of his characters in full on the margin of his manuscript? Are they not always greatly abbreviated even in print? I have now before me a copy of Henry V. in the "Temple Classics" Edition. There I find, in the margin, "Bur" for "Burgundy," "Exe" for "Exeter," and so on. It is no proof whatever of "carelessness," still less of "boredom," that a dramatist should so abbreviate the names of his characters. On the contrary, it is a proof that he is too sensible a man to waste his time in such a wholly unnecessary way as to write out these names in full whenever they occur. In the present case the wonder is not that the playwright so much abbreviated the names, as that he took so much trouble with them as he did. For if the reader will glance at the facsimiles published by Sir E. Maunde Thompson, he will find that the dramatist was at the pains of writing the name "Lincolne" (e.g.) several times in full on the margin, and what is more, writing it well and legibly. What, then, as to the "bovine 'Moo'"? The reader will see the word "Moor," in all cases but one, I think, beautifully written in the margin. In the second sheet it is so written no less than six times. It is true that at the top of the third sheet it is dashed in as "Moo," though at the bottom of the same sheet it appears again beautifully written as "Moor."

I repeat, I wish to speak with all respect of the venerable author of Shakespeare’s Handwriting, but I really cannot understand how any reasonable man can seriously argue from this most ordinary,
usual, and natural abbreviation of names of characters in the margin of a manuscript play that the dramatist was such a careless man, and so "bored" with things in general, that we should quite expect him to cut short his own signature, whether to his Will or his Deeds, or his answers to interrogatories in a Court of Justice! If this is the sort of reasoning upon which we are to be asked to believe that the handwriting of this "addition" is identical with the handwriting of the Shaksper signatures, the case must be weak indeed.

There is yet another important point to be considered with reference to this "addition" to the play of "Sir Thomas More." If it is really in Shaksper's handwriting, "it must," writes Sir E. Maunde Thompson, "be placed in the earlier period of his career, when he was employed in such work as adapting and supplementing the plays of other authors." 1 Now Mr. Richard Simpson, who first started this hare, suggested 1586 or 1587 as the date of the play, but inasmuch as Shaksper of Stratford, in all probability, did not come to London before 1587, this, as Sir E. Maunde Thompson writes, "appears to be too early"! Dr. Greg, in his edition of the play for the Malone Society suggested "some such year as 1592 or 1593," which would do very nicely indeed if only it could be established, but subsequently Dr. Greg, on further consideration of the matter, has felt inclined, as we are told, to bring down the date to the end of the sixteenth century, "which he thinks would be fatal to the attribution of the addition to Shakespeare." 2 Nevertheless, critics are now wrangling as to whether or not the "Harleian Addition" shows certain peculiar spellings, which are supposed to be evidential of "Shakespearian" authorship; but as no Shakespearian manuscripts have come down to us (unless, of course, this "Harleian Addition" be one) and we really do not know whether any one of the quartos was actually printed from "Shakespeare's" manuscript, or, if so, whether any peculiarity

1 Work cited, p. 62. Yet Sir E. Maunde Thompson had already expressed the opinion that the liberties which he took with the MS. "would suggest that the writer was one who held a high place among his fellow contributors to the piecing-out of the play, and that they recognised his superior talent." Ibid, p. 37.

2 Ibid, p. 62. Note; where we are referred to The Modern Language Review, Vol. VIII. (1913), 89.
to be found therein is to be attributed to him or to the printer, or whether, in fact, it was a "peculiarity" at all and not shared by many other writers, these disputants merely involve themselves in a quagmire of uncertainties, though they, of course, carry on the controversy with a great show of learning and entirely to their own satisfaction.¹

And now let us come back for a moment to the Will signatures, and let us again examine the third signature, which is preceded by the words "By me," concerning which Sir E. Maunde Thompson writes as follows:—"The firmness and legibility of the first three words, 'By me William,' as compared with the weakness and malformation of the surname, and of both the other signatures, are very striking. We can attribute that weakness and malformation certainly to the condition of the dying man. The firmness of the first three words indicate, we believe, an effort on the part of the invalid, which, however, he was incapable of maintaining to the end."²

"Certainly!" Well, it is, of course, very convenient to assume certainty for that of which your argument stands in need, but, as I have already said, there is really no certainty whatever that William Shakspere was a "dying man" at the time when these words were written; there is, indeed, no evidence at all that he was ill at that time, or so weak that it was an effort to him to write his name. But let us look closely at the words in question as they appear in the facsimile provided by Sir E. Maunde Thompson.

In the first place, we notice not only "the weakness and malformation of the surname," which are, certainly, very striking, but also that the surname is not even in the same alignment as the other three words. We notice further that those other three words, "By me William," are, in marked contrast with the surname, written in a fine, strong, legible hand, much better written, indeed, than is the "Wallace" signature for which so much is claimed. Is it reasonable to be content with Sir E. Maunde Thompson's explanation, viz.: that the signatory made a great effort and managed

¹ There is, however, a sensible letter on the matter, signed "M. A. Bayfield," in *The Times Literary Supplement* of May 15th, 1919.

² *Work cited*, p. 13. (Italics mine.) See frontispiece for facsimile of this signature.
to write these three words in such excellent style, and then found himself unable to do more for his surname than make such a miserable scrawl? I think not. I think, if we can only dismiss our prejudices and examine the words with an entirely impartial mind, another explanation will suggest itself as at least highly probable. What should we say of this "signature" if it were the signature of an ordinary man, and involved no Shakespearian controversy? For myself I should say that some other man other than the testator—a law-scrivener, may be—wrote the words "By me William," and left it to the testator to add his surname. And that, as I venture to think, is what was done in this case. It is not the writing of a man in mortal illness who made a great effort, wrote three words beautifully, and then collapsed. It is the writing of a good penman in ordinary health, followed by that of a man who possibly was ill, but who, probably, was always a very poor penman.¹

But I think I hear some indignant critic exclaim, "That is an absurd suggestion. Only look at the dot under the final curve of the 'W.' That is evidential of the fact that the signature is Shakespeare's autograph, for you will find it also in the "Wallace" signature, and in the signature to the conveyance of the house at Blackfriars. It was evidently a peculiarity of Shakespeare's"!

But, to use a vulgar expression, "that cock won't fight," for this "ornamental dot," as Sir E. Maunde Thompson calls it, was a common feature in this and other capital letters of the English alphabet at this time, "particularly in the scrivener's hand."²

It was, in fact, a well-known mark of the scrivener's hand. I do not mean to say, of course, that he always made use of it, but where it is found it is in the great majority of cases, if not always, the

¹ Since this was in type the learned Mrs. Stopes has expressed her opinion, for which she gives detailed reasons, that the "B" in the words "By me" differs very materially in its formation from the "B" in the manuscript of the "Harleian Addition." She even suggests that the words "By me" may have been written by "the lawyer." My own suggestion goes a little further, viz.: that the "lawyer," or law-scrivener, wrote "By me William." See Mrs. Stopes' letters in the Times Literary Supplement, May 29th and June 19th, 1919.

² Work cited, p. 25.
sign of the professional writer—scrivener or law clerk.¹ Let the reader examine the originals or facsimiles of the deeds relating to the Blackfriars property, written, of course, by the law-scrivener, and he will find that both in the purchase-deed and in the mortgage all the capital W’s show this “ornamental dot” under the right hand curl of this letter.

Now let the reader examine the two other Will signatures. In the first the writing has become so indistinct, as shown in the facsimile (No. 4) provided for us by Sir E. Maunde Thompson, that even a paleographer might hesitate to decipher it. But, as already mentioned, many years ago, when the ink had not so suffered from the effects of time, a facsimile was made by Steevens which appears in his edition of Shakespare, and which was reproduced in Boswell’s Malone (Vol. ii., p. 601).² By this we learn that in this signature to his Will Shakspere made use of a W of very different shape from that of the third signature, and, further, that it has no “ornamental dot.” In the second signature also the “dot” is “conspicuous by its absence.” In fact, it is very remarkable how the “William” of the two first signatures differs from the very well-written “William” of the third signature.

Now let us assume, with Sir E. Maunde Thompson, that Shakspere at the time of the signing of his will was a sick man—which is a not unreasonable assumption, although there is no direct evidence in support of it. What more natural than that the scrivener, or law clerk, should have written the words, “By me William” at the end of the document before presenting it to the testator for his final signature, which he wrote as a bad penman, and, probably, a sick penman, might be expected to write, and, as already mentioned, not in the same alignment as the three preceding words?

¹ A gentleman employed at the Guildhall Library, who has had a very large experience in the reading of old manuscripts, writes to me that “the dot was seldom, if ever, used by lay-writers.” Besides the supposed instance of Shakspere, I do not know where it is to be found in a lay-writer’s hand, but I do not pretend to be an expert in these matters. At any rate it is extremely improbable that a “dying man,” making a great effort to write his signature, would have been at the pains to add the “ornamental dot”!

² See copy at p. 38.
At the present day, of course, when the law as to Wills is far stricter than it was in Shakspere’s day, and when a testator’s signature has to be witnessed by an attestation clause in due form, such a course of procedure would be most irregular, but in the year 1616 things were very different, and, I may again remind the reader, that at that time there was no actual legal necessity that a Will should be signed at all. But here I shall, of course, be met by the objection that the “ornamental dot” is to be found also in the signatures of the Blackfriars purchase deed and of the “Wallace” answers to interrogatories, though it is not seen in the Blackfriars mortgage signature.

Well, as already pointed out, the “dot” appears in all the capital W’s of both the deeds in question, and my suggestion is that, in the case of the purchase deed, the law scrivener, Robert Andrews, or his clerk, Henry Lawrence, wrote the signature which was to identify the seal bearing the initials “H.L.” as Shakspere’s seal for the purposes of the deed, and in this connection it may be remembered that, as Halliwell-Phillipps tells us, “the scrivener who drew up the deeds, and his assistant,” were at that time “the usual official attestors.” If it be asked why the scrivener should have confined the name to the tab above the seal it can only be answered that it was a very general practice so to do, although, certainly, not legally necessary. We must bear in mind here also that there was no legal necessity for Shakspere’s signature to be attached to the deed at all, the law requiring “sealing and delivery” only. The above hypothesis would also account for the extraordinary difference between the signatures of the purchase deed and of the mortgage.

With regard to the “Wallace” signature, it is impossible not to notice the large ink-spot under the letter s, and it has been already suggested by some that the witness held his pen there to acknowledge the abbreviated signature written for him by another—the Court official or law-scrivener—as one is apt, at the present time, to hold one’s pen when acknowledging one’s “act and deed.” The practice of the old Court of Requests, about which we know nothing, must have been very loose in allowing an abbreviated signature at all, and there seems no insurmountable difficulty in conceiving that
Shakspere's deposition, in answer to interrogatories was authenti-
cated in this way. Certainly I should have expected that the official
or scrivener, would have written a better hand, but this objection
is removed if we subscribe to Sir E. M. Thompson's pronouncement
that the signature, though "written carelessly," shows "remarkable
freedom and facility."

It may, of course, be argued that Shakspere sometimes employed
the scrivener's "ornamental dot" and sometimes omitted it. Sir
E. M. Thompson writes that the style of Shakspere's hand, "as
shown by his signatures, was that of the ordinary scrivener or copyist
of the time" (p. 38), and Mr. Richard Simpson had previously
said the same. No doubt these critics had remarked the "orna-
mental dot" in some of the alleged Shakspere signatures, but
they omit to refer us to other lay-writings, or signatures, in which
this mark of the scrivener (besides the character of the writing)
may be found.\footnote{\textit{Shakespeare} does not appear to have used it in the Harleian MS.}
At any rate, whatever may be thought of my
suggestion with regard to the Blackfriars purchase deed signature,
and the "Wallace" signature, I remain fully convinced that
the words "By me William" of the third Will signature were
not written by the same hand as penned the following scrawl which
stands for the surname.

Shakspere, it may be here added, must have had a large number
of business transactions at Stratford, but not one of his signatures
has come down to us except those already mentioned—an unfor-
tunate, and, surely, a rather remarkable fact!

And now, what is the conclusion of the whole matter? We
have seen how little faith is to be placed in the paleographers. The
paleographer of to-day disagrees with the paleographer of yesterday,
and the paleographers of to-day disagree amongst themselves.
They are unable even to agree as to how a recently-discovered
signature of Shakspere, which is supposed to show that he was
"capable of writing in fluent style," and which is alleged to be
"the key of this leading factor of the problem," is to be read.

Now, as I have already said, I am not a "paleographer," and I
certainly do not propose to make any attempt to follow Sir E.
Maunde Thompson's minute examination of the forms and con-
struction of the letters of those depressing hieroglyphics known as "Shakespeare's signatures," or his comparison thereof with the letters found in the "Harleian Addition." He "who undertakes to explain to others the identity of this hand with that hand," writes this paleographer, "may be qualified, not to force his opinion upon them, but to guide them how to look at things in a way which he has found by study to be the right way to reveal to untrained eyes points of evidence in the documents under examination, which, without such guidance, might escape them. When he has done this his task is accomplished, and he leaves it to them to decide whether his conclusions are just."

"Good. I have read Sir E. Maunde Thompson's work, and done my best to follow his arguments, and I have arrived at the conviction that his "conclusions," so far from being "just," are but the baseless fabric of a dream. I am convinced that if this were an ordinary case of the comparison of handwriting, no reasonable man would think of asserting that the "Harleian Addition" was written by the same hand as that which wrote the "Shakespeare signatures." It was only the passionate longing to find some "Shakesperean" manuscript which could have suggested such an idea, an idea as fantastic as any that the "Baconians" have ever promulgated. It is only the eyes of those who ardently desire to believe that will see—or imagine that they see—any characteristic, common to the two handwritings affording a scintilla of evidence of their identity. The wish has been once more father to the thought. That which has been seen by the believers has been seen by the eyes of faith and not of reason. It is a fond thing vainly invented. But those who wish to believe, will, of course, believe."

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1 I would refer the reader to the facsimile of Richard Quiney's letter to Shakspere, set forth in Shakespeare's England, Vol. I., after p. 294. I verily believe that if writing of that character were to be found in an anonymous play of the period, and of fairly good quality as a drama, not only would it be ascribed to Shakspere, but that a better case might be made out for it than for the "Harleian Addition." It is, of course, possible that this addition may have been written by "Shakespeare," but if so the less "Shakspere" he!