

"Crime on Paper"

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SO MUCH already has been written upon the many phases of document examination that I would indeed be presumptuous in failing to pay tribute to the life work of the men who have strived to place this branch of science in its present place as an important aid to criminal investigation. Thanks also must be given to the Staff of the Technical Laboratory of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the several students of the subject who have rendered me considerable assistance and instruction during the past years.

That the subject is complex but fascinating there can be little doubt, as a brief survey of the motives leading to crimes on paper will readily disclose. These motives range from greed, political aspirations, vanity, or an inexplicable desire to falsify historical records; through the entire range of human emotions to sexual perversion, pathological lying and mania.

Essentially the judgment of handwriting is an analytical process depending on the same fundamental rules of logic as are used in chemical analysis. In addition to the critical examination of individual writing characteristics with a view to the identification of the writer, the wide field of Applied Physics and Chemistry has played an important part in the examination of documentary evidence.

One of the earliest attempts to use science for the detection of forgery was in 1810, when a certain historical German document was regarded with suspicion. A strong acid solution was poured over the document revealing the presence of prussian blue in the ink. Prussian blue had not been discovered when the document was alleged to have been written, thus proving the document to be a forgery. Unfortunately the document was destroyed in the process.

During the year 1176 the first statute covering forgery made it a treasonable offence to forge the seal of the King or an Overlord. Forgery, as we know it today, was not made a statutory offence in England until 1562, although forgery had extensively been practiced prior to that date. Only the gradually changing social and commercial conditions caused forgery seriously to be regarded. Money was taking on a new significance and credit was becoming of paramount importance, with the result that fraudulent manipulation of commercial instruments received more severe punishment. Between the years 1818 to 1825, the unbelievable number of 94,000 persons were charged in England with the forgery of one issue of £1 notes; 7,700 being sentenced to death.

Comparison of handwriting by expert witnesses was refused by the Courts until 1854, when the Common Law Procedure Act enacted that a comparison of disputed writing with any writing proved to the satisfaction of the Judge to be genuine should, in Civil cases, be permitted by witnesses. Such writings and the evidence of witnesses respecting the same could be submitted to the Court as evidence of the genuineness or otherwise of the writings in dispute.