

Signature Experts—Interesting Facts for Business Men.

S. S. Packard, noted as a skillful penman, writes to the New York Mail concerning "signature experts," the occasion being the late Taylor will case, which turned in great measure on the genuineness of the testators' signature:—"More than twenty years ago, in Cincinnati, I copied the Declaration of Independence, appending *fac simile* of the signers' names. Mr. Thomas Stevens, at that time editor of the Cincinnati Atlas, took occasion, in a pleasant way, to doubt my assertion that I had copied the signatures with a pen. To convince him, I asked him to sign his name on a sheet of paper, which he did. I immediately wrote ten copies of his signature above and below the original, and handed him the paper for him to select his own. After a careful examination he selected one for his own. He was wrong. He tried again and again, with the same result, and finally, by mere guess work, he hit the right one. And it was a remarkable fact that, after he had really discovered his own, he could see the most astonishing absurdities in all the others."

Some six years ago I was speaking with a well-known publisher of this city, who sat at his desk signing some checks that his book-keeper had prepared for him. The signature was of the firm, and was a peculiar one, as he wrote it. I casually remarked that that was an excellent signature for a forger. He promptly responded that there was no forger who could sign that name so as to deceive him.

"Oh, yes there is," said I.

"Where is he?"

"He is standing at your elbow."

"Do you mean to say," said he, "that you can imitate that signature so I cannot detect the forgery?"

"I mean to say," said I, "that I think I can do it, and am willing to try it."

"If you will write that signature," he replied, "so I cannot distinguish it from my own, I will!"

"There, there, don't be rash. I should dislike to take advantage of your present excitement. If you will just write the signature at the top of that letter sheet, we'll see what a little impudence can do."

He did as requested. I took the sheet and went to the book-keeper's desk. Here I exchanged it for another of the same relative position. I imitated the signature in a very free, careless way, not attempting a servile copy, but preserving the characteristic strokes. I then very carefully wrote underneath it three faithful imitations, making four signatures, all my own. These I took to the proprietor and told him to select his own signature. With surprisingly little effort he pointed out the first signature, and at once began to criticize with severity my base imitations.

"Well," said I, "I will confess they are not as well done as I expected to do them, or as I could do them if my nerves were steady. But really," said I, "don't you think that if one of these signatures were placed at the bottom of your ordinary check, your bank would honor the check?"

"Well, no," said he, "I don't think it would."

"I suppose," said I, "there is no doubt about the top signature—that would bring the cash?"

"Oh, yes. I should like to see our bank refuse that signature for an ordinary sum."

I then went to the book-keeper's desk and produced the original signature.

"How about this?" said I.

He looked at the signature—then at my "base imitations"—then at the crowd of interested spectators who had quietly gathered around, and who were beginning to take in the richness of the joke, and finally he burst out in an expression which was a mixture of astonishment, chagrin, merriment, vexation, and perplexity, and holding out his hand, with unconditional surrender written all over his face, he exclaimed, "sold!"

This was the only word in the American language that could adequately express the situation.

But the sell was a very easy one, and required no skill at all. The fact is that when the original signature was compared with the forgeries, the discrepancies were so palpable that a "way-faring man, though a fool," need not be taken in; and yet, if my friend had not been a deacon, which he was—and is—and if I had been as most forgers, I could have won a very nice sum, had I offered to stake it on the issue.

Finally, to convince the deacon that he was not the only fool in the firm, I called up one of the other partners, and showing him the three false signatures,

asked him to decide which was the genuine. With great show of real discernment he selected the top one, and began at once to point out the weak points in the others simply by comparing with what he considered the genuine. "Yes," said he, "they are pretty fair imitations; but don't you see the length of this *g* and the turn of this *n*? Now look at the original, and see where this capital *J* sweeps around. There is an attempt at it in the imitations, but it is a very weak one."

"Then you couldn't be imposed upon by one of these lower signatures?" said I.

"No, not I. They bear forgery upon their very face."

"Well, how about the first one? No mistake about that? You would readily cash a check with that signature?"

"Oh! yes; that is all right. Anybody who ever saw the deacon's sign-manual could tell that at a glance."

So the deacon divided up his chagrin with the junior partner, and felt better—or worse, I've forgotten which.

The fact is, no man is safe in swearing to his own signature—not even Horace Greeley to his own—for no man writes his signature twice alike, although he may preserve the characteristics. And I would give very little for the testimony of "experts" unless backed by pretty strong collateral evidence. It would not be difficult ordinarily to identify a body of writing, such as a page, or even a dozen lines, but to decide as to the genuineness of a single word or signature is more than I should like to do if either life or happiness depended upon it.

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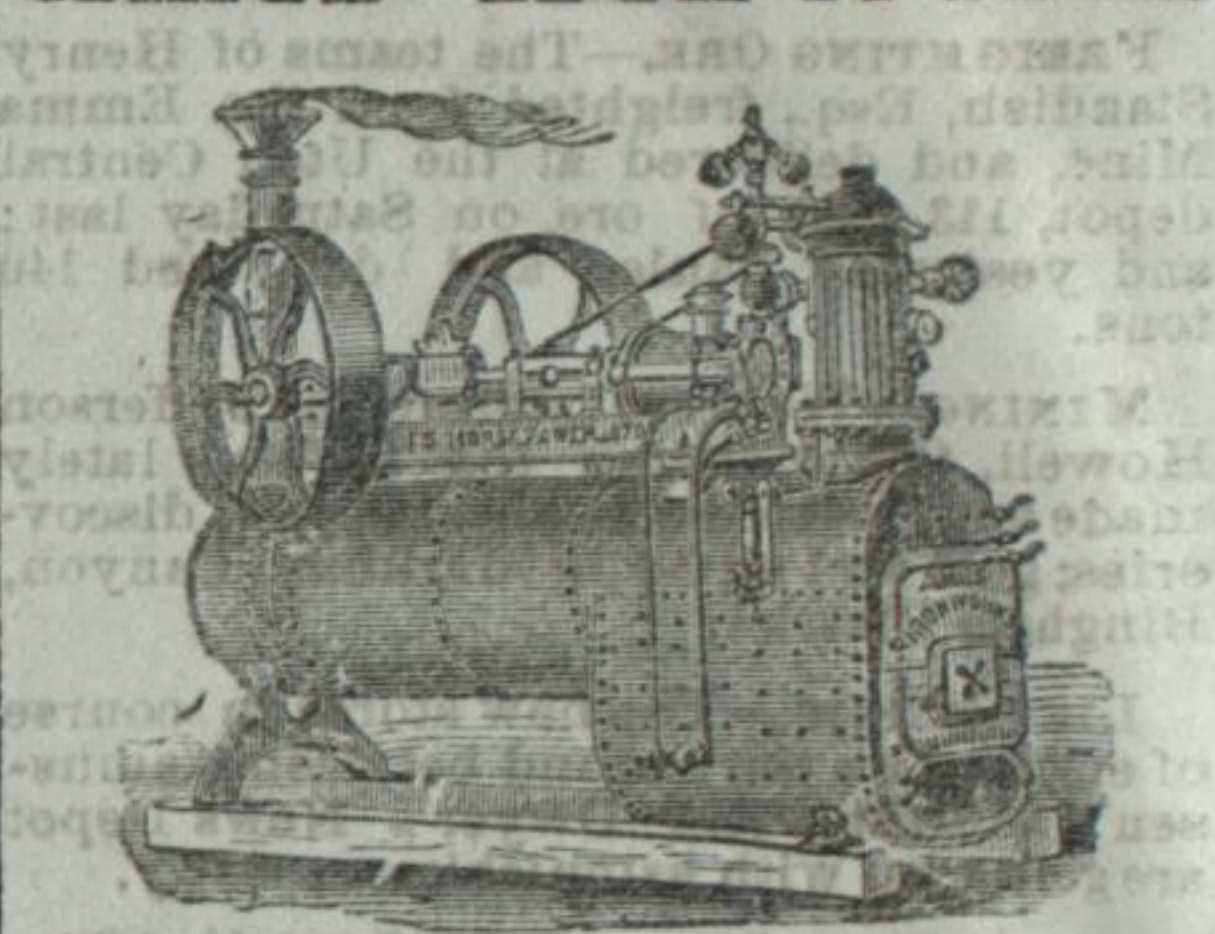
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