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Ancient Handwritings

W. SAUNDERS



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Ancient Handwritings

An Introductory Manual for Intending Students
of Palaeography and Diplomatic,

BY

WILLIAM SAUNDERS.

To J. A. M. S.

1909.

CHAS. A. BERNAU, WALTON-ON-THAMES.

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ANCIENT HANDWRITINGS.

AN INTRODUCTORY MANUAL FOR INTENDING STUDENTS OF PALÆOGRAPHY AND DIPLOMATIC.

Palæography and Diplomatic

The rules for deciphering the old handwritings that one encounters in documents of an earlier date than the seventeenth century, are embodied in two distinct though related and interacting sciences. The first of these is the science of Palæography, which has for its province the mere deciphering of the writings, as well as questions concerning the nature of the material upon which it is imposed, of the implements by which it was produced, and of the medium through which the thought and intention of the writer are recorded. Diplomatic, on the other hand, the second of the sciences, is chiefly concerned with the style of the document, with the peculiar formulas which kept changing from age to age, and with the special methods of assigning dates, the contents of the documents, and even the individuals who produced them. In the words of M. Léon Gautier, the learned Professor of Palæography in the University of Chartres, "Palæography studies the body, while Diplomatic studies the soul of the Document." *

For genealogical purposes the latter is not so necessary as a thorough grounding in the former, and though in the following essay Diplomatic will not be neglected, our chief and first attention must be devoted to the systematic study of Palæography. To do so in an adequate manner then, we must begin with the very first appearance of an attempt on the part of man to keep a permanent record of his deeds, intentions, and desires, and thence we must follow the development of the writing step by step, until

* *Le paléographe étudie le corps des chartres, le diplomate en étudie l'âme.*

we arrive at the point where the invention of printing stereotyped and fixed a standard by which future generations were to be guided. By tracing the evolutionary system in this way, we shall be all the better able to understand the various modifications which letters undergo from time to time, and forms which must appear meaningless and arbitrary to the uninstructed, will at once take their natural place in the developmental process, and surprise us no longer. Thus also from certain knowledge of a known system we shall be able to draw inferences with something nearly approaching to conviction as to their correctness, with regard to writings which were hitherto unfamiliar or unknown.

The term Palæography is derived from two Greek words (*παλαιός*, *ά, ον*, =old or ancient, and *γράφω*, *γράφω*=to write), and the science to which the time applies takes cognisance of all kinds of ancient writing, as inscriptions on stone, on coins and on seals, as well as those upon paper or parchment; and in all languages, both ancient and modern. That which concerns us, however, is known as Latin Palæography, which only deals with the writings derived from the Roman or Latin alphabet, not *necessarily* in the Latin language, although the great bulk of the writings which we have to consider *are* in the low Latin of the Middle Ages. Our starting point then is the Roman

The Roman Alphabet alphabet as it was in the time of Cicero, which was little different from the printed capital letters at present in use.

The earliest documents were entirely written in capitals, and are as easy to read as is anything in such characters written at the present day. The only difference lies in the fact that in these old MSS. no breaks occur between words, and the writing finishes at the end of one line and commences at the beginning of the next, without the slightest regard being paid to the structure or etymology of the words.

Pre-Carolingian Handwritings We shall now briefly consider the pre-Caroline or pre-Carolingian hands, viz. : those produced earlier than the reign of Charlemagne, when the great reformation in

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writing took place. There were five distinct species of these hands, which may be taken in chronological order. Those writings, which were entirely composed of capitals, were known as Majuscule, while the mixed hands and those in small letters are called Minuscule. The Majuscule hands comprise the first four of the following, but we have in the fifth the earliest tendency towards the Minuscule and Cursive styles:—

1. THE PUNITIVE or ANGULAR type which is found principally in inscriptions on stone or coins. Instead of curves the letters take an angular form, as $\mathfrak{B} = B$; $\mathfrak{D} = D$ of which the Greek Δ is a survival; $\mathfrak{O} = O$; and $\mathfrak{P} = P$.
2. SQUARE CAPITALS: This is the style still in use, to which reference has already been made. There are very few MSS. extant which are entirely written in this form, but it was frequently used during the Middle ages for ornamental purposes in Biblical and Liturgical MSS., and even in Charters and other documents square capitals are occasionally met with, often a part or the whole of the first line being in these characters.
3. RUSTIC CAPITALS.—These are modifications of the Square Capitals, and mark the first step in the degeneracy which, in the late Middle Ages, had such far-reaching effects, and which makes such a work as this so necessary an adjunct to the paraphernalia of the working genealogist. The cause of the decadence was, of course, the increasing necessity for writing more swiftly, and the concomitant carelessness on the part of the scribe. The most characteristic examples of letters in this style are $\mathfrak{A} = A$; $\mathfrak{E} = E$; $\mathfrak{L} = L$; and $\mathfrak{T} = T$. A characteristic of this style also was the fact that all the letters were not of equal length and did not adhere strictly to the lines, but frequently extended both above and below them.

4. UNCIAL writing is, like the Rustic, a modification of the regular capital, but instead of being square like the former it is round, and probably originated in the same manner as the Angular form, which was easier to make on stone or metal, while curves were easier to form on the softer materials, such as parchment or vellum, which were now in use. The derivation of the term *Uncial* is not certain, but it may have come from the Latin *Uncia*—an inch. It first appears in St. Jerome's Preface to the Book of Job, *uncialibus, ut vulgo aiunt, litteris*. The chief characteristic of Uncial writing lies in the fact that the main vertical strokes generally rise above or fall below the line. There was still no separation of the words,* and punctuation was comparatively rare. There were also few abbreviations and contractions, a phase of the subject which will be dealt with at greater length later, though it would almost require a special treatise to itself, forming as it does one of the greatest obstacles the palæographer has to overcome. Uncial writing was in use from the second to the ninth century, and is important as it formed one of the principal bases upon which the Caroline Reform was effected.

The characteristic letters are $\text{a} = \text{A}$; $\text{d} = \text{D}$; $\text{e} = \text{E}$; $\text{h} = \text{H}$; $\text{m} = \text{M}$. The age of an Uncial MS. can generally be estimated by reference to the letters E and M. The earlier the MS. happens to be, the higher in the e will the tongue appear, and the more perpendicular is the first limb of the m , thus m .

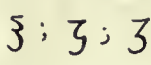
5. DEMI-UNCIAL; HALF UNCIAL; or MIXED UNCIAL.—This is an exceedingly important form as it marks the transition

* The reason why words were not separated was the fact that, materials being so costly, scribes were compelled to economise space as much as possible. The only wonder is that they were so long in introducing the Minuscule and Cursive forms.

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between the Majuscule and Minuscule or Cursive forms. It must not be forgotten that all these hands constitute the literary forms of writing, but there was also a correlative and more widely used form known as Cursive writing, and the distinction between the two might be compared with that which to-day exists between ordinary type printing and individual handwriting. In time, however, the two forms became to a large extent merged into one, and there was practically no distinction between them during the later Middle Ages.* The following are the principal marks by which demi-uncial writing may be recognised:—

- (a) A is sometimes in the form of an *i* and a *c* juxtaposed, viz. :  sometimes like two *cs* in the same position .
- (b) G is invariably made up of three distinct strokes, .
- (c) The last limb of the M turns to the left .
- (d) N is always a square capital .
- (e) R is always cursive ; .

We now pass to the true Cursive and Minuscule forms of handwriting. The former of these as used by the Romans is, as has been remarked,† now known only from *graffiti* or wall inscriptions, waxen tablets, or Imperial Rescripts, and is only of antiquarian interest, so it need not concern us here. About the seventh or eighth century, however, a tendency to combine the literary and cursive styles can be discerned, and on this combination the five National hands, which now became the vogue in Europe, were to a considerable extent moulded.

* As the pre-Carolingian Cursive forms are of little or no value from the evolutionary point of view, they are only dealt with here in passing. Examples are to be found chiefly in Pompeian Wall Inscriptions, on Waxen Tablets, and in Imperial Rescripts. Alphabets of these early forms are given in Sir E. Maunde Thompson's *Handbook*.

† See above note.

**The Five
"National"
Handwritings**

Concerning the five National hands little need be said here, for notwithstanding their historical importance, from our point of view, they, with a single exception, contribute little to the development of Palæography. The epithet National is somewhat misleading, as they were not really so in the sense of having been invented by the various nations by whom they were utilised. They were all derived from the Roman forms, and were national only in so far as they were worked out on lines peculiar to the nations whence they derived their names. Two of these National hands were derived from the Roman Half-Uncial writings, and are of special interest to us, both on account of their great beauty, and because they were peculiar to our own land:—

- I. SCRIPTURUS SCOTIA.—The first is known as the Irish National Hand or *Scripturus Scotia*, and is the most important of them all, as it alone had a durable influence on all the hands of Europe. The Roman missionaries first introduced the Uncial writing into Ireland, and this was modified and improved by the Irish scribes until it acquired the well-nigh perfect forms which continue to the present day, and of which the famous *Book of Kells*, in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin, is the most characteristic example. Though alien to the purpose of this book, it may be remarked in passing that the intensely beautiful illumination in this wonderful MS., derived from the earlier Byzantine art, and consisting of interlaced ribbon ornaments of the most delicate description, often terminating in the heads of griffins, is one of the most typical features of this hand and period. In one instance, 158 interlacements, all perfectly distinct, were counted with the aid of a magnifying glass in a single square inch.

There are two species of writing in the Irish hand, termed Round and Pointed respectively, the difference being

that in the latter the letters are laterally compressed and pointed instead of being round, as in the *Book of Kells*.

2. ANGLO-SAXON HANDWRITING.—We now come to the Anglo-Saxon Hand which at first was similar to the Irish form, having been directly derived from it. It was introduced into Scotland and England by Irish missionaries, and some of the earlier MSS. in this hand, such as the Half-Uncial copy of the *Lindisfarne Gospels*, are quite as remarkable as the best of the Irish MSS., if not more so. Before long, however, the writings of the Continental schools gradually began to filter into the country, and to exercise a modifying influence upon the handwriting of the period. This reached its culmination at the Norman Conquest, when the native English Minuscule, as the official hand, disappeared; the invaders retaining their own forms for all legal purposes. The development and evolution of these forms it will presently be our duty to follow. We shall first, however, because of their bearing (which, though comparatively small, was not unimportant, and cannot be despised) upon the evolution of the writings, from which the working genealogist may hope to obtain the greater part of his material, devote a brief consideration to the Continental National Hands derived from the Roman Minuscule and Cursive writings.
3. LOMBARDIC HAND.—From the ninth to the thirteenth century the National Handwriting of Italy was known as the Lombardic Hand. The descent from the Roman Cursive can generally be traced in its earliest examples, and some of these are very beautiful. The characteristic letters are the I, which is usually very tall; the T, which is like the demi-Uncial T, resembling two *cs* stuck together; and the R, which is like the demi-Uncial R, but is a little longer *ŕ*.

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4. VISIGOTHIC.—Visigothic was the name given to the National Hand of Spain. It never acquired the beauty which was so strong a characteristic of the Lombardic Hand, and by the end of the eleventh century it had become so illegible that a church council made a recommendation that it should be abolished altogether. Toledo was the great school in which it flourished. It had some peculiarities which were foreign to other hands, and are worthy of remark, as *quum* invariably used instead of *cum*; and the contraction *ꝑ*, which in all the other hands signifies *pro*, in Visigothic stands for *per*. The usual contraction for *per*, it may be mentioned, was then and throughout the Middle Ages *ꝑ*.
5. MEROVINGIAN HAND.—The Merovingian Hand, the last of the National styles, was used over the whole extent of the Frankish Empire. It was very rude and varied widely in character, some of the better examples closely resembling the Lombardic hand. The chief importance of the Merovingian style of writing lies in the fact that it was upon it that the Caroline reform was based, and as the Caroline Minuscule was the actual progenitor of the Roman hand and the writings with which the genealogist is principally concerned, it is from the period at which it was consummated that our detailed and analytic survey must now commence. In dealing with the National Hands I have not deemed it necessary to give any minute examples or facsimiles, as their value to the genealogist is chiefly historical, but anyone who wishes to follow up the study of these most interesting writings, whether for practical or historical purposes, should take as a basis Chapters XVI. and XVII. of Sir Edward Maunde Thompson's excellent *Handbook of Greek and Latin Palæography*, published in the International Science Series.*

* There are also several good foreign collections of facsimiles, and treatises on these systems, lists of which I shall be pleased to send to inquirers on receipt of a stamped and addressed envelope.

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It is an undoubted fact that the most momentous event, for good or evil, in the history of Palæography was the reform of penmanship, to use a modern term, in the reign of Charlemagne, hence commonly called the **Caroline Reform**. Its importance can scarcely be exaggerated, as it set a standard of writing and gave the forms of caligraphy a certain permanence and fixity throughout Europe. The reform was inaugurated by the famous Emperor, who, immediately after he had ascended the throne, established a school of writing at Aix-la-Chapelle. In 789 A.D., also, he issued a decree ordering the entire revision of all Liturgical books which had formerly been full of errors and inaccuracies. The result was a great renaissance of interest in writing in schools and monasteries, and new teaching centres were established throughout the Empire. The most famous of these was that of Tours, where, under the rule of Alcuin of York, the beautiful **Caroline Minuscule** hand known as the Caroline Minuscule received its inception and later development. The chief results of this great event, which took about fifty years to reach completion, were:—

1. The establishment of a form of writing which, though later modified to a slight degree by national influences and idiosyncracies, was yet, in a general sense, common to the whole of Christendom. As time went on, the character and forms of the writing slowly altered, but the unification achieved by Charlemagne was never really broken, such alteration being practically uniform and, to a certain extent, simultaneous throughout Europe. The importance of this is greater than appears on the surface, as, in attempting to estimate the age of a document when dates and other evidences are absent, the style of writing employed may generally be taken as a safe guide. A certain allowance should always be made, however, for the time that a new style would take to reach such

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countries as were at some distance from that in which it first appeared. A type appearing in France, for example, generally took from eight to ten years to reach and to come into general use in England and Scotland.

2. The national hands gradually declined and disappeared, or were absorbed in the new form.
3. A beginning was made, tentative at first, but, as time went on, more regularly, with the separation of words.
4. There was a general roundness and boldness in the formation of the letters, and altogether the writing was of much greater legibility and beauty than any of the national hands of the period.

There seems, however, to be in man an innate tendency to degenerate rather than to progress, or even to maintain for any length of time a fair standard of excellence, unless there be some stimulating influence driving or drawing him on; and as in morals and conduct, so is it in art. The high standard set by Charlemagne then did not long continue—had it done so, this book would scarcely have been necessary. Till the middle of the thirteenth century the standard was maintained and frequently bettered. The twelfth century charter, given at the end of this volume (facsimile No. 1), is typical of the style in vogue throughout England and Scotland at this period. Its clear, legible and handsome appearance could hardly be surpassed, and it is second to none of the other handwritings of Northern Europe at the same period. Only in Italy do we find anything at all to compare with it for the qualities named.

**The Intrusion
of the
Gothic Type** In the middle of the preceding century, however, the Gothic type had already commenced to make its appearance, and it constitutes the prevailing form during the thirteenth and later centuries, though we frequently find the Caroline Minuscule and the Gothic Minuscule at the former period, existing side by side.

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Up to this time there are few MSS. written in the post-Caroline hand which cannot be deciphered after a little practice by even the uninitiated, and beyond a word or two upon the characteristics of the writings of the three preceding centuries, nothing need be said about them. Almost from the beginning, as has already been remarked, there were, of course, two concurrent styles, viz.: the Book Hand, and the Cursive writing which was more commonly employed for Charters, Household Accounts, and for the multifarious conglomeration of documents which are of special interest to Genealogists, and to this latter our chief attention will be presently directed.

**Characteristics
of the X., XI.
and XII.
Centuries**

The characteristics of the three centuries in question may then be briefly summarised as follows:—

X. CENTURY.—The writing is rounder, better proportioned, and generally more elegant than that of previous centuries, though a great many old letters are still retained. The letters are generally elongated, and ligatures are fewer as the hand becomes more legible.

XI. CENTURY.—There is a steady improvement both in books and in diplomas. Ligatures almost disappear, the open *a* (*u*), becomes less frequent, and long letters such as *b*, *d*, *f*, *h*, *k* and *l* are made much longer, and their long shafts are frequently ornamented. *v* sometimes takes the place of *u* at the beginning of words. When two *is* come together, strokes are frequently placed above them, as *ii*, and continuations of words are generally indicated by hyphens. Contractions—a phase of the subject which will be specially dealt with further on—are gradually increasing.

XII. CENTURY.—The Caroline Minuscule reached its highest perfection. The letters become taller; the open *a* is no longer found; the diphthong *æ* is replaced by *e*; *u* and *v* as consonants

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are interchangeable at the beginning of words; *n* frequently takes the uncial form; the small *s* is frequently found both at the beginning and at the end of words; and long letters begin to have hooks both below and above the line. (See the second Charter, Facsimile No. II., for a good example of the writing of this century.)

The signs of decadence, which commenced in the thirteenth century, and for which it is specially remarkable, are evidenced by the angularity of the writings of the period, a sure sign also that the Gothic influence is now supreme. In the Book Hand this, as time goes on, undergoes a

**Black Letter
and Italics**

proces of slow development until it culminates in the genuine Black Letter, which, at the time of the invention of printing had reached its worst condition, and became stereotyped in the earliest printed books. The Italians, with their customary artistic insight and good sense, abandoned the Gothic type and introduced the Roman Minuscule, which was borrowed from them by France and England, and has since remained the literary type of these nations. The German and other Teutonic peoples retained the Gothic alphabet however, and they are only now beginning to discontinue it. The Aldine type, to which we now give the name *Italics*, it may further be interesting to note, was first used by Aldus Minutius in 1501, in a *Virgil* which he printed at Venice. This was the Cursive form of the period, and the particular style adopted was said to have

**Difficulties
in the Black
Letter and
Cursive Hands**

been the actual hand-writing of the poet Petrarch. The chief difficulties in interpreting the Book hands from the thirteenth century till the invention of printing then, are those incidental to the deciphering of ordinary Black Letter type and are easily overcome. They principally consist in distinguishing such combinations as *mi* from *nu*; *m* from *in*; *i* from *r*, and so on. Such a word as ~~mirifica~~ = *mirifica*, may be cited in illustration of the confusion such methods involve.

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The genealogist then will find that his greatest difficulty in deciphering the handwritings will centre around the Cursive forms, and as in the case of the Book Hand, a certain feature of its decadence in the thirteenth century is its angularity. This is again especially noticeable in the tops of the *m* and *n*. Other signs of corruption are the number of superfluous strokes; the increasing illegibility of the writing; the difficulty of distinguishing *c* from *t* (see for example the word *Scottorum* in Facsimile No. III); the constant habit of the scribes of running *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, and *u*, into *c*, *n*, *m*, *r*, and *t*; the absurd and frequently ridiculous complexity of initials; and the steady increase of contractions and abbreviations. On the other hand, the diphthong *æ* now regularly appears as *e*; and *i* even when standing alone is regularly accented. In this century, too, the shafts of tall letters are generally split and clubbed. This custom extended from about 1250 to 1350, and constitutes a seldom failing evidence of the approximate date of the particular document in which it is found. The following three words copied from a charter of Edward I.,

dated 1303, will illustrate the principle employed—*Aquid Omnibus ad** (This is a characteristic example of the official hand in the reign of Edward I.) At this period again appeared a further development in the custom of closing the top loop of the *a*, thus *ā*., and the bottom one of the *s*, thus *ſ*. Examples of both these peculiarities are illustrated in the extract given above, from the Edwardian Charter. The closing of the *s* loop is further developed in the next century, when we find *s* written *ſ* and *σ*, both forms in time becoming common.

The XIV. Century During the fourteenth century the development of the Cursive hand was rapid, and its degradation was equally so. The best scribes naturally found their way to the courts of the various kings and rulers, and documents

* *Aquitanie Omnibus ad.*

emanating from the Royal and Imperial Chancellaries were still tolerably legible. But in the various offices to which a genealogist will instinctively turn, the increase of business and consequent pressure of time caused the writing to be done hurriedly and carelessly, and some of these hands are exceedingly puzzling even to the expert palæographer. Exemplification of this will be found in Nos. IV., V. and VI. of the Facsimiles, which have been chosen from among the worst examples of such hands to be found in H.M. Register House in Edinburgh, and from these the learner should familiarise himself with the formations of the various letters and characteristics of the periods which they serve to

illustrate. He should obtain as much practice in deciphering the writings of MSS. dating from the beginning of the XV. to the end of the XVII. Century as possible. This can be easily obtained if he resides within a near radius of a good library, and the reproductions best suited for his purpose may be found in the following volumes, all of which are of easy access:—

**The XV.,
XVI & XVII.
Centuries**

1. Sandars (W. B.). *Facsimiles of National Manuscripts of England.* (Ordnance Survey), 4 parts. Southampton, 1865-1868. fol.
2. Innes (C.). *Facsimiles of National Manuscripts of Scotland.* (Ordnance Survey), 3 parts. Southampton, 1867-1871. fol.
3. Gilbert (J.T.). *Facsimiles of National Manuscripts of Ireland.* (Ordnance Survey), 4 parts (in 5 vols.). Dublin and London, 1874-1884. fol.
4. The publications of the Palæographical Society, and the New Palæographical Society.

These are the commonest and most accessible collections of reproductions, but there are many more besides, both British and Foreign,* and it must depend upon the situation of the student's place of abode to what extent he will be able to gain experience from such facsimiles.

* I will be glad to supply lists of such reproductions on application. See Note on page 10. Correspondents should state whether their researches or studies are restricted to any particular period.

Acquisition of Facility

Of course it must never be forgotten that there is no royal road to the acquisition of facility in the deciphering of these cramped and crabbed ancient writings, and just as hours of practice must be devoted to golf, piano-playing, or to speaking a foreign language before any measure of skill is attained, so in palæography every opportunity for obtaining experience should be seized and used to the best advantage. But on the other hand, though the initial difficulties are great, no one need despair; a systematic study of the writings of this period, of which the last six reproductions here given constitute a representative series of examples, will soon make the student familiar with their characteristics, and he will find that there is seldom any fundamental deviation from these types. A little patience and logical inference will soon do the rest, and enable him in time to spell out the writing upon any document of the period in question. Of course some knowledge of Latin is essential, as most of the documents at that time were written in this language, but as it is chiefly with proper names that the genealogist has to deal, this knowledge need not be profound, unless he is desirous of learning all that was connected with the individual for whom he is in search.

From the middle of the fourteenth century, the process of degradation was rapid and very marked. The angularity which had appeared with the adoption of the Gothic forms increases as time goes on, and ultimately becomes universal. The closed *s* becomes greatly exaggerated *σ*, and care must be exercised to prevent its being taken for *o*. The *e* also takes a form not unlike *o*, and persists in that form *Ο*, or in a modification or exaggeration of it, down to the end of the seventeenth century. In an Indenture dated 20th October, 1682, in my possession, it is consistently written thus, (*Ortobar*; *the*; *forobar*; etc.). The scribes also became more and more careless as the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries progressed, as is evidenced by the increasing heaviness and coarseness of the writings. In the reign of Elizabeth, however, our

intercourse with Italy began to have a beneficial effect upon caligraphy, as upon the other arts of the time, and it quickly toned down into a lighter and more elegant form, of which the writing in the Letter of Queen Mary and Darnley, our seventh Facsimile, is a representative and characteristic example. It is a clear fluent style, such as no previous Cursive hand had ever before approached in England, and it contains intrinsic evidence that the appearance of the current modern hand is not far distant.

About the beginning of the sixteenth century, for official purposes, a new kind of writing was evolved, and it took the form of a modification and intermingling of the Book and Cursive Hands of the period, and this became the style that was generally employed for legal documents. It was, not unnaturally, characterised at first by a certain heaviness, which, however, gradually became less, and it likewise grew more elegant till the first decade of the seventeenth century, when it also acquired a form not lacking in symmetry and beauty. Out of this came the Chancery Hand, which was used for records under the Great Seal, and the Court Hand employed in the Courts of King's Bench and Common Pleas, for fines and recoveries, placita, etc. The latter was in use till the reign of George II., and the former still survives in the modern engrossing hands employed in enrolments and patents. These hands, with the assistance of the knowledge gained from a study of our facsimiles, are not difficult to decipher, and after a little practice, facility will soon be acquired. Wright's *Court Hand Restored* (1879) will be found valuable by the student, if in difficulty, for these forms. In my notes on the *facsimiles*, reference is again made to them, but they are not really hard to read, and after a few of their typical peculiarities are mastered, no difficulty whatever should be experienced. I have in my possession indentures and other legal documents dating from the middle of the seventeenth to the end of the nineteenth century, any one of which an individual of average intelligence who had never seen such a document in his life before, could read after five minutes study of the writing.

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Signs and Abbreviations

The chief difficulty which the palæographer has to encounter in his task of deciphering the writings of ancient times lies, however, not so much in the cramped, crabbed and corrupt nature of the writing itself, which, bad as it not infrequently is, yet exhibits even in its badness something of a system that can be studied and overcome, and has generally a certain degree of consistency and universality rendering it capable of more complete scientific treatment than otherwise were possible; as in the confusing methods adopted by the scribes of abbreviating, contracting, and expressing words and phrases, by means of signs wherever and whenever it could be done. The prevailing cause of so troublesome a custom was the expensiveness and scarcity of parchment and other materials upon which the writings were made. As the business of the world increased also, the necessity of economising time as well as material, likewise became a factor of no small importance. We thus find that from the Caroline Reform there is a continuous increase of such abbreviations and contractions to be found in documents. Some of these were universally adopted and were common to all European countries. Others were restricted to certain nations and localities, while not a few were produced at the mere whim or necessity of individual scribes. It is a subject which would, for anything approaching an exhaustive treatment, require a treatise to itself, and only the commonest forms can be dealt with here. There are several good dictionaries which may be found useful, however, as—

1. *Dizionario di Abbreviature Latine ed Italiane*, by A. Cappelli. Milan, 1899. 12mo.
2. *Dictionnaire des Abréviations Latines et Françaises*, by A. Chassant. Paris, 1884. 8vo.
3. *The Record Interpreter; Abbreviations, &c., in English Historical Manuscripts and Records*, by C. T. Martin. London, 1892. 8vo.

But these must always be used with caution, and those having a good knowledge of the language in which the document is written, will be wiser to exercise their own common-sense than to trust too closely to such lexicons.

Single Letter Abbreviations The earliest form of abbreviation was the use of a single letter, generally an initial to denote a complete word. Those who have ever attempted to decipher Roman inscriptions must have been puzzled frequently by an apparently inexplicable string of capital letters. It is important to note that such letters frequently indicated the names of persons and their titles.† This survived to some extent during the Middle Ages, and is not even yet wholly extinct. (Witness the Inscriptions on Coins). When a single letter is written to indicate a word in common use, there is generally placed either above or beside it some conventional sign from which the missing letters may be gathered. For example, $\bar{N}$ usually stood for *non* in early MSS., and later on we find it signifying *noster* and *nostrī*.

Two or More Letter Abbreviations We then come to words represented by two or more of their letters. It may be by the first letters of the word, as $I\bar{T}$ = *item*; $CU\bar{I}$ = *cujus*; or more frequently by its salient letters, as in $O\bar{M}B$ = *Omnibus*; $S\bar{C}S$ = *Sanctus*; or $X\bar{P}\bar{I}$ = *Christi*. These last three are very common and occur all through the Middle Ages. From this method was developed the custom of writing the initial or leading letters of the various syllables of a word, as $E\bar{G}$ = *ergo*; $Q\bar{D}$ = *quidem*; $Q\bar{B}$ = *quibus*; $T\bar{M}$ = *tamen*, and so on.

† A curious custom prevailed for distinguishing the names of females. The letter which stood for a masculine name was reversed to signify its feminine correlative, as C = *Caius*: $\mathcal{C}$ = *Caia*.

* This curious combination is of course Greek, and was adopted by the Mediæval scribes through ignorance, imagining that the Greek characters were equivalent to the Roman letters similarly formed.

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Tironian Symbols The need of indicating inflections and terminations was still felt however, and this was solved by the adoption of certain of the Tironian symbols—a species of shorthand, said to have been invented by Cicero's freedman Tiro, but which need not here concern us—to indicate that certain words had been omitted. Small overwritten letters as **Q^o** - *quo*; **V^o** - *vero*; **V^x** - *verum*; and **H^c** - *hunc*, were also employed. These latter modes prevailed throughout the Middle Ages, and must not be ignored. A few shorthand signs, some of them Tironian; as **Σ** - *est*, of frequent occurrence in Irish MSS.; **7** - *et* or *and*; **7̄** - *etiam*; **κ** - *autem*; **Ξ** - *ejus*; **=** - *esse* or *est*; **Ṽ** or **ṽ** - *ut*; and **9** or **9** - *con*, *cum*, or *cun*, at the beginning of words, very common throughout the Middle Ages (see the tenth and thirteenth words in Facsimile No. II., and the repeated word *command* in No. V.); are also very frequently to be met with.

Suppression of Letters We have now to consider (1) those words in which the ending is suspended or suppressed, and (2) those in which letters are omitted from the middle, or from the middle and the end.

1. In both of these modes there were many examples which prevailed throughout the whole of the Middle Ages, and continued till the adoption of the present system of caligraphy. These examples became exceedingly common, and a mastery of them is absolutely essential. Thus we have in early times **B:** - *bus*; and **Q:** - *que*. The **:** in course of time was modified by rapid and careless writing into a **3** shaped character, and the **B:** and **Q:** were replaced by **b3** and **q3**. In words ending in *que*, the **q** as well as the *ue* was also frequently suppressed, and we have such examples as **at3** - *atque*; **ne3** - *neque*; and **q3** - *quoque*. We also find the **3** signifying *et* as in **deb3** - *debet*; **pl3** - *placet*; **p3** - *patet*; and **s3** - *set*, the mediæval form of *sed*. The **3** later came also to be used for *m* and *est*, as in **ide3** - *idem*; and **inter3** - *interest*. A knowledge

Ancient

of the language in which the writing happens to be executed, will of course enable the Palæographer to judge which ending is required. The facsimiles should also be carefully studied in this connection.

A drooping stroke at the end of a letter generally marks the omission of *is*, as  - *prestitis*.* Another very common mark of abbreviation is a horizontal stroke placed above the final letter, and it almost invariably represents a suppressed *m* or *n*; thus *autē-autem*; *enī-enim*; *nō-non*; and so on. Analagous to this sign is a stroke written through the tall shaft of the letters *l* and *b*. It is not so easy to give even approximate rules for supplying the omitted letters in this case, and again one's knowledge of the language must be brought into requisition. Such examples as *sb-sub*; *vl-vel*; *mlto-multo*; *plra-plura*; *singla-singula*; *lire-littere*; *libe-libere*; and the like are generally self-evident, and prevail throughout the Middle Ages.

2. This brings us to words contracted by the omission of letters from the middle or from the middle and the end of a word. These, of course, are greatly the most numerous, and are sometimes extremely puzzling, especially when they signify unknown or proper names. But here again we have certain conventional signs by means of which the missing letters may be approximately guessed. Thus a waved vertical stroke rising from the preceding letter usually signified the omission of *er* or *re*, as in *b^suiter-breuit^r*; *c^tus-cert^s*; and *int^ptatis-interpretatis*; yet it must here be kept carefully in mind that the form of these signs was by no means fixed, and that frequently it was highly ornamental and arbitrary, especially in the Cursive Hands. For example, we find such combinations as  - *tam*;  - *antem*;  - *annuit*;  -

* This is a very common type of Cursive writing. The  signifies *p^s* = *prae* or *pre*, a form that will be explained immediately, and the final loop = *is* as explained above. The convenience of these forms for rapidity of execution will be at once apparent.

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felicem; *mercurij*; *interpretatio*; and *interpretatur*. Still another method which was exceedingly common was the use of overwritten letters. These are generally vowels written above a consonant in a small hand, and in such cases another consonant immediately preceding or following the overwritten vowel is to be understood, such omitted consonant usually being *r*, as *cta*-*carta*; *uba*-*uerba*; *gtia*-*gratia*; Other letters than *r* may be understood as in *q*-*qua*; *bō*-*bona*; *q̇*-*quibus*; although such examples are not found so frequently as the former. The consonants above which overwritten letters are usually found are *b*, *c*, *d*, *f*, *g*, *h*, *p* and *t*.

The use of the single letter as a means of abbreviation in early times has been referred to, and it can easily be conceived that so economical and simple a device for the saving of space and time would not be allowed easily to go out of use. We thus find many survivals of the practice, but in nearly every instance they became stereotyped or were used in conjunction with certain signs which never varied. A mastery of these can be acquired with very little labour and patience, and as they are in constant use, will not easily be forgotten. The following should at once be committed to memory:—

p̄ - *pro*, as in *p̄bis* - *probis*.

p̄ - *per*, *par*, or *por*, as in *p̄tem* - *partem* and *op̄tet* - *oportet*.

P with a stroke above, or an undulating line rising from it, *p̄* or *p̄s*, stands for *p̄re* or *p̄rac*. Thus we have it in *interpretatio*, the example already cited,† and in *p̄t̄it*-*praeterit*; in *p̄lan*-*prelati*; and in *p̄st̄o*-*prestito*.‡ The last example depicts a characteristic of the Cursive writings which is apt to cause great confusion and difficulty in

* Those desiring to carry their studies in Palæography beyond the point necessary for the genealogical student, must bear in mind that in the Visigothic National Hand, *p̄* signifies *per*, not *pro*, as in all other hands. See page 10.

† See above.

‡ See Page 22.

deciphering words, namely, the habit of joining the sign to a letter. This custom, in conjunction with the use of ligatures, constitutes one of the greatest obstacles in the way of deciphering a Cursive Hand. It is often a question whether or not the continuation of the letter is really intended to represent such a sign, or is merely an ornamental flourish. Another method that was very common was that of continuing the top curve of the long *s*, and crossing the stem in the form of a bow, thus *ſ*. This mode underwent many different phases, and represented the combination *ser*. The following are examples—*ſuit* = *seruit*; *ſmo* = *sermo*; *affit* = *asserit*; and *ſualit* = *sernatus*; whilst *ſomiffij* = *commissarij*. This last is a rare occurrence of its signifying *sar*, instead of *ser*. Examples of all or nearly all of these and the other illustrations given above, are represented in the facsimiles, and a careful study of them will tend to bring out many aspects which are dealt with all too inadequately in the text.

I shall now give a few examples from Cursive MSS., of some of the forms taken by these abbreviations. For these and much other matter in this connection, I here take the opportunity of acknowledging my indebtedness to the late Canon REUSENS, of the Roman Catholic University of Louvain, whose *Éléments de Paléographie*, as a text-book, has seldom been equalled and never excelled. From that work most of my remaining illustrations are taken, and students who can read French will be amply rewarded by devoting an occasional hour to a perusal of the Reverend Canon's illuminating pages.

<i>Per, par</i> and <i>pro</i>	= <i>ſ ſ ſ</i>
<i>Prae</i> and <i>pre</i>	= <i>ſ } ſ ſ</i>
<i>Pri</i>	= <i>ſ } ſ ſ</i>
<i>Pro</i>	= <i>ſ ſ ſ ſ ſ</i>

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There were a great number of special signs employed for *et* or *and*. The following were the most common in use after the XIV. Century :—

et. 2. 2. 2. 2. (et - *et pro*).

A curious example of the use of one of the signs for *et* will be found towards the end of the second line of the facsimile No. II., where we have *scilicet* - *Scilicet*. Such a combination was by no means infrequent.

For *esse* we find $\approx$, h , e , f , so that when such a combination as $\approx m^9$ is encountered, it must be read as *essemus*. The sign 9 here met with for the first time at the end of words usually signifies *us*. Equally curious, and much more numerous, are the hieroglyphics for *est*, a few of which may be met with by genealogical researchers ; z , 3 , E , z , t , z , f . The letter *q* also takes some peculiar forms, the principal of which are q - *quia*; q , q , q , q - *quod*; q q = *quam*; q - *quae*; q - *que* (*pron.*); q q = *quem*; q - *qui*; q - *quid*; q - *quibus*; q - *qualibet*; q^m = *quantum*; q , q , q - *quoque*; q^c - *quod sic*; q^te - *quatenus*.

A very common form of abbreviation was to write the first letter of the word with the last letter, either overwritten in a small character, or written alongside, in which latter event both letters were of an equal size. Thus we have such very frequent examples as a - *anno*; d - *datum*; n - *nunc*; q - *quod*; u - *uero*; *ee-esse*. In the last case a mark is generally written above the two letters to indicate a contraction. These, in common with all the other methods of contracting words, are so numerous that it is an absolutely hopeless task to attempt to give even a representative selection, but as I have already indicated, a knowledge of the language in which the record is drawn, and a little patience will work wonders, and what at first sight may appear an almost insuperable

difficulty, will, with practice and experience, become less and less, until it practically disappears altogether.

**Punctuation
Marks**

Still another difficulty that must be overcome by the Palæographer, lies in the fact that punctuation marks are of so uncertain a character. They are different in many cases from the modern signs; and similar marks to those we now employ used in different applications are sources of great confusion and uncertainty. But the worst obstacle of all is the frequent absence of such marks altogether. Latin scholars will realise how great an obstacle to the correct interpretation of a document this can be, and even this is increased by the bad Mediæval Latin that was consistently made use of. Yet the difficulty is by no means insuperable, and when it is remembered that certain formulas in the style and phraseology of these ancient documents recur with constant regularity, even the badness of the Latin sometimes tends to assist rather than retard the interpretation of the document, and it soon becomes almost second nature to the Palæographer to know where the proper punctuation marks should occur. The most ancient MSS. were not pointed at all, and even the words were not separated, but these need not detain us. In the pre-Carolingian period, pauses were marked by three dots, one above the other ; , and these again need only be mentioned in passing. These were replaced in the early Middle Ages by ' the comma , and ; the semi-colon. Then from the eleventh century onward, punctuation became exceedingly irregular. At that time the dot served both for a period and comma, but such signs as — ; , and 7 are also found. In the succeeding century the usual signs for a comma were 3 and 7. Then for a time punctuation was almost entirely neglected, although the oblique accent ' was frequently used for all kinds of pauses. This continued to be used to mark pauses in discourses, but during the periods which most concern us, in addition to the signs already mentioned, the following were the most common :—

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Points of Interrogation : ?

Points of Exclamation : o o o

I was frequently marked with a faint accent í.

Corrections

The following methods of marking corrections will also frequently be encountered, and a knowledge of them should prove useful :—

1. To indicate the deletion of a word, dots were placed beneath it.
2. This was also the manner employed for the deletion of letters, though frequently the modern arbitrary method of drawing a line through the word or letters was resorted to. (An illustration will be found in Facsimile No. VI.)
3. To substitute one word for another, dots were placed beneath the wrong word, and the correct one placed above it.
4. When two words required to be transposed oblique accents was placed above, and at the beginning of each, as "*nomine ép̄c papias-episcopus nomine papias*."
5. When words were intended to be omitted, it was customary to mark them with two oblique strokes, similar to those above *nomine* in § 4.

Authenticity of Documents

As the genealogical researcher may frequently have to estimate the probability of a document being genuine or otherwise, he ought to be in a position to arrive at some definite conclusion on the subject. Upon that alone may hang the credibility of the whole question, whether a single individual or all the individuals mentioned in a particular document can be fitted into his pedigree or not. I propose, therefore, before concluding this essay, to suggest a few simple rules by which such a conclusion may be reached. This forms the subject matter of Diplomatic, and is a special, most important, and most intricate branch of the art of deciphering ancient documents. It has a literature of its own, and there are erudite practitioners who confine their

attention exclusively to the mere interpretation of these ancient writings. When I state that the standard modern work on the subject, *Manuel de Diplomatique*, by A. GIRY, a large 8vo. volume published in Paris in 1894, extends to nearly a thousand closely printed pages, an idea of its vastness may be obtained. Yet here, again, a few simple rules should prove extremely useful to the Genealogist, and may at least assist him in detecting forgeries, which, though not obvious to the uninitiated, are yet easy of detection when one has been put upon one's guard.

The Charter

The most important Diplomatic document was the Charter, a document which is obviously of primary interest from the Genealogist's point of view. It is generally in two parts, viz.: (1) the text of the Act, usually preceded by a narration of the circumstances, etc., which called it forth; and (2) the Protocol, the initial and closing formulas which varied with the circumstances to which it owed its production. These formulas are of great importance in estimating the probabilities of the deed's being authentic or otherwise. Forged Charters were very common during the later Middle Ages,* but scribes were exceedingly ignorant and unscientific, so it is no uncommon occurrence to find the formulas of the XVI. Century embodied in a Charter dated two or three hundred years earlier. The writing is also, as a rule, conclusive evidence of a Charter's authenticity, as forgers even when they ante-dated a deed by some centuries, seldom made any serious attempt to copy the earlier caligraphy. The facsimiles, which are fairly representative of the writings of the centuries in which they were produced, are valuable also in this respect. The literature on this subject is mostly foreign, but I shall always be glad to send *bonâ-fide* inquirers a list of available books on the subject, or to inform them privately of the particular formulas in use at any specified time. It is, of course, obviously impossible to give such a list here, as it would extend far beyond my available space, and be of small interest to the general reader.

* Before the Reformation there was scarcely an Abbey in England or France which had not at least one Charter forged in its own favour.

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Copies

The Diplomatist must also be careful to distinguish between the originals and copies of documents. In the latter, the material characteristics were omitted, and frequently the word *Copia*, *Transcripta*, *Transvata* or *Transumpta* was inserted. The copy also frequently varied from the original, sometimes intentionally, but usually unintentionally. Several copies of a document were often made, and each was regarded as authentic, though only one had been amplified. *Duplicata*, *Triplicata*, etc., was usually written on such documents. With the intention of preserving originals, copies were often written for everyday use and reference. These are extremely misleading, as in such cases the scribe usually sets himself to produce an exact facsimile of the original. Finally, when a document had been lost or destroyed, new Acts were usually produced from what remained or was remembered of the original, but these may generally be regarded rather as forgeries than as copies.

Dates

Dates and signs of validation are also of very great importance to the Genealogist, and these likewise form special studies in themselves. There were many systems of dating in vogue throughout the Middle Ages, and even at one time, and in the same country, different systems frequently prevailed, causing a considerable amount of confusion, and not seldom of error in the minds of students. From the time of the Norman Conquest, the year began on the 25th March in England and Ireland till 1752, and in Scotland till 1600, when the first day of the year was changed to the 1st January. In regard to the former method, great care must be exercised in drawing conclusions, as two methods of reckoning were in vogue. Some began a particular year on the 25th March preceding Christmas, and others on the same date following Christmas, thus making a difference of one year. Where uncertainty remains, it is customary to write both probable dates, thus "14th July, 1734/5." Before the Norman Conquest, the year began in England on 25th December. It will be seen, however, from the Charters reproduced in this volume that the method mostly employed

in these documents was to record the number of the year of the reigning monarch's rule.*

Witnesses

The chief signs of validation were signatures and seals which require little comment, the former being generally self-explanatory to a greater or less degree,† and the latter belonging to the kindred sciences of sigillography and heraldry. Signatures and enumerations of witnesses are of very great importance to the student and practitioners of Genealogy, and should always be carefully noted. Where witnesses are only mentioned in the *preamble* or *oratio*‡

* Other methods of dating do not concern us here, but again let me state that I hold myself entirely at the service of readers who are interested.

† I do not, of course, suggest that all signatures are so, or that the subject is to be lightly dismissed. Like all branches of Palæography and Diplomatic, its extent is co-extensive with the number of practitioners, and a volume of Mr. Bernau's G.P.L. series might well be devoted to the subject of signatures alone. What I wish to imply through the statement in the text is that, consequently upon the reader deciphering the signature, it, as a *rule*, explains itself.

‡ Though not strictly relevant, a brief explanation of these terms may prove interesting. It has been remarked that there were two main divisions of the Charter, and these might be again analysed into fourteen sub-divisions. These were:—

I. THE INITIAL PROTOCOL, consisting of:—

1. The Invocatio or Chrim. The latter consisted of such a sign as , a monogram of X P I, which was regarded with a kind of superstitious awe.
2. Title or Subscriptio—name of the person in whose name the Act was drafted.
3. Address or Inscriptio—name or names of those to whom it is addressed.
4. Greeting or Salutatem.

II. THE TEXT, viz.:—

5. Proem, Arenga or Harenga, or Preamble—a general statement of the events which called forth the Act.
6. Promulgatio or Notification—that the Act is made known to all.
7. Oratio, or Expositio—statement of the case. It differs from the preamble, insofar as the Oratio gives a detailed relation of what in the former is stated merely in general terms.
8. Dispositio—enacting or Operating Clause.
9. Sanctio—penal clause or clauses.
10. Corroloratio—notice of authentication.

of the deed, the absence of the signatures or seals of such persons must not too hastily be taken as conclusive evidence that they were not actually present at the time; on the other hand, it has sometimes been found that persons mentioned in the *oratio*, which is generally expressed in the past tense, were absent at the time, and occasionally, even dead. The explanation of this is that a considerable time frequently elapsed between the draughting and the expediting of the document, a period during which many events, having a distinct bearing upon the transaction, might reasonably take place.

If any doubt is felt as to the authenticity of any document, some regard should also be paid to the material upon which it is written, to the materials with which it has been written, and to the manner in which it is written. If it is on paper, water-marks* should be studied as well as the texture of the material and colour of the ink. Even the style of the document may frequently assist one in approximately fixing its date, but these are matters for the expert to decide rather than the general researcher. It is not the intention of the writer of this volume to endeavour to make those who do him the honour of perusing his book diplomatic scholars, all that he proposes is to put them on their guard against too rashly accepting every document as genuine and authoritative merely because it happens to be old, and written in a hand crabbed and unintelligible to the uninitiated.

III. THE CLOSING PROTOCOL OR ESCHATACOL:—

11. Subscription—signatures and names.
12. Date of Place.
13. Date of Time.
14. *Appreciata*, Amen—prayer for the effectuation of the deed.

This comprised a complete Charter, but it is very seldom that such documents are encountered in which all of these sub-divisions are present.

* A useful work on this and other kindred subjects, entitled *A Guide to the Collection of Historical Documents, Literary Manuscripts and Autograph Letters, etc.*, was published by the Rev. Dr. SCOTT and SAMUEL DAVEY, F.R.S., in 1891.

By the Genealogist no document should be ignored, valuable material may often be discovered in the most unlikely places, and volumes of registers, rolls, accounts, and other miscellanea often prove the veriest gold mine to the pedigree hunter and modern ancestor worshipper. Such documents written in the XV., XVI., XVII. and XVIII. Centuries are, of course, the most likely to yield a golden harvest, and if the writings in the four facsimiles, Nos. V., VI., VII. and VIII. are thoroughly mastered, little difficulty will be experienced with any hand produced during or after the XV. Century. Of course, there were wide divergences of mannerisms and character, especially from the XVI.

Individualism Century onwards, when Individualism began to assert itself, and to illustrate all of these would necessitate the transcription of at least one document from the pen of almost every scribe who ever wrote during that period, but the general principles in vogue at any particular time remained practically fixed, and underwent only the usual slow evolutionary process such as we can trace even in the penmanship of our own time, so that when the underlying basal type is thoroughly grasped, the eccentricities, idiosyncracies and mannerisms of individual writers can be mastered in a very short time, with the exercise of a little patience, study, and logical consideration of the example which happens to be under the reader's view. There are good and bad writers at the present moment, and to such a Palæographer as I refer to, it is as easy to read the worst example he can find of the period in question, as it is for a person of average intelligence to decipher the letter which he may occasionally have the misfortune to receive from an uneducated and illiterate correspondent in the twentieth century. Let no one be discouraged, therefore, by difficulties which a little application will soon show to lie only upon the surface, and though I do not pretend that actual difficulties do not exist, I must still maintain that they have been greatly exaggerated in the past, and have only to be grappled with in real earnest to disappear—

“dissolve,

And like the baseless fabric of a vision,
Leave not a wrack behind.”

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Acknowledgments For kind assistance in the preparation of this volume,
I beg to record my thanks to the following:—

Professor P. HUME BROWN, M.A., LL.D., of the University of Edinburgh, for valuable advice and guidance, and for permission to use my notes of his lectures as the basis of the work.

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The Librarian of the University of Edinburgh * and his assistants for allowing me to have access at all times to volumes that are scarce and difficult to procure.

And above all, to—

JAMES CURRIE, Esq., M.A., F.R.S.E., of Leith, for such facilities for study as have alone made the writing of this volume possible.

WILLIAM SAUNDERS.

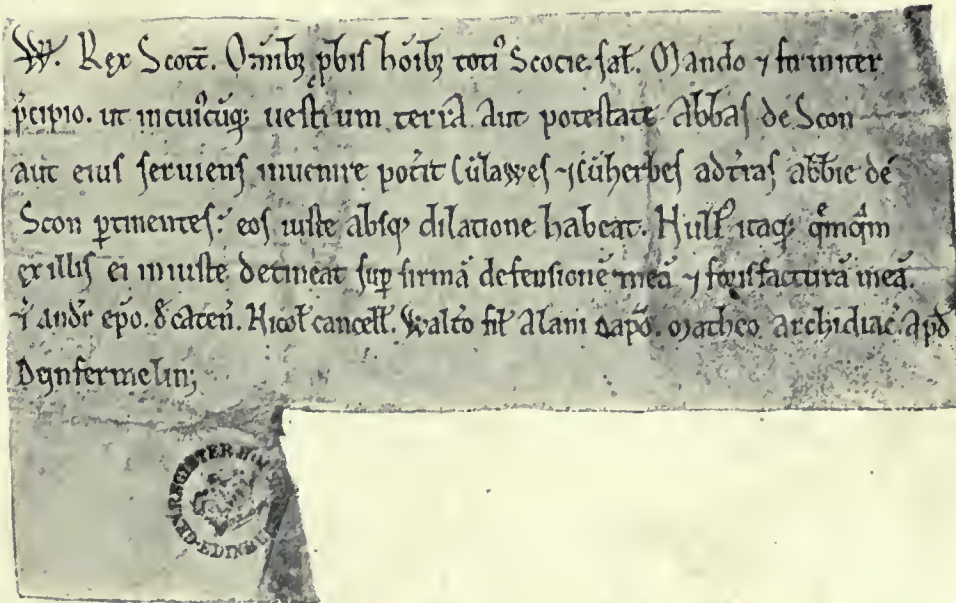
I, SUMMERBANK,
EDINBURGH.

* Since writing the above, it is with extreme regret that I have to record the death of my dear and learned friend, Mr. Alexander Anderson, the Librarian of the University, who was universally known, under his pseudonym of *Surfaceman*, as a poet of taste and distinction. I shall never forget his kindness in placing the treasures of the Library at my entire disposal, the interest he took in my work, and the sense of anticipation with which he awaited its publication, which, alas, he was fated never to see.

FACSIMILES, AND NOTES THEREON.*

I.

PRECEPT FOR RECOVERING FUGITIVE SERFS OF THE ABBOT OF
SCONE. (William, the Lion, King of Scotland, 1165—1214.)



Willelmus Rex Scottorum, omnibus probis hominibus totius, Scocie.: salutem. Mando et firmiter precipio, ut in cuiuscunque uestrum terra aut potestate Abbas de Scon aut eius seruiens inuenire poterit Cumlawes et Cumherbes ad terras Abbacie de Scon pertinentes, eos iuste absque

* These facsimiles, all of which are photographed directly from the originals, are, of course, necessarily greatly reduced in comparison with these originals, and the constant use of a magnifying or reading glass will facilitate students in deciphering and reading them.

dilatione habeat. Nullus itaque quemquam ex illis ei iniuste detineat super firmam defensionem meam et forisfacturam meam. *Testibus* : Andrea Episcopo de Catenas, Nicolao Cancellario, Waltero filio Alani Dapifero, Matheo Archidiacono. Apud Dejnfermelin.

The aesthetic qualities of this beautiful little Charter of William the Lion of Scotland, have already been elucidated in the text, and further comment thereon is scarcely necessary.

It will be noticed that the Charter is undated, but it appears to bear intrinsic evidence of having been produced not later than the beginning of the second decade of William's reign. (See Hailes' *Annals*, 1776 Ed. Vol. I., p. 132 *note*). As an historical document, the instrument is of great importance. It has been reproduced before, i.e., in the *National MSS. of Scotland*, but never in any text-book on Palæography, and it is no small matter that we have been privileged to include so good a facsimile of this important deed, in such a volume as this, published at so low a price.

We have here an example of a single letter standing for a proper name in the first word of the deed. It will be seen also from the word *omnibus*, that at this early date, the sign for the contraction *us* or *bus* : , was already in process of evolution. An earlier stage appears in *cuiuscunque*, where the : is written ʒ. The contraction for *pro* in *probis* is likewise very carelessly written  instead of , and in a more imperfect production might have been overlooked altogether. For us, then, the chief value of this Charter lies in the fact that it shows so clearly the method employed in symbolising contractions, and because it also gives some indication of the origins of the evolutionary process by which the symbols later became so troublesome.

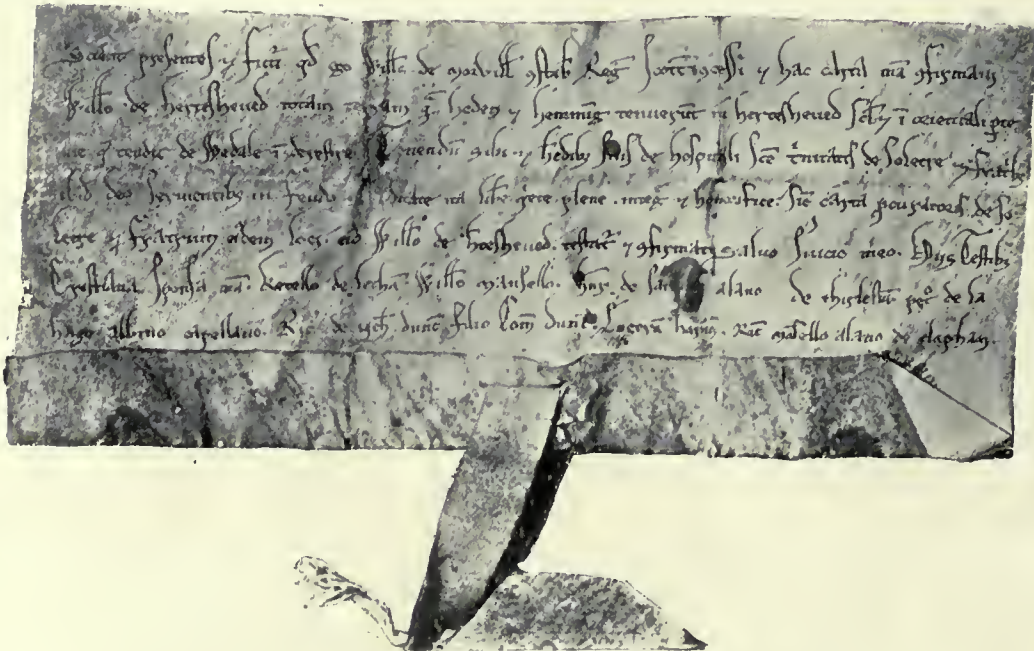
The following details should be carefully observed and familiarised by the student :—

1. The sign for *et* 7, in the first, third and fifth lines.
2. The contraction for *re* or *er*, as in *precipio* and *poterit*.
3. The modification of the horizontal stroke indicating an omitted *m* or *n*, as in *firmam*.
4. The punctuation marks 3 for a comma, after *pertinentes*, and ; for a period at the end of the Charter.
5. The uncial *N* in *Nullus* and in the proper name *Nicolao*. Also the uncial *M* in *Mando* and *Matheo*.
6. The overwritten letters in *quemquam*.
7. Most curious of all is the symbol for *Testibus* at the beginning of the last complete line. This sign, or a modification of it, may occasionally be encountered all through the Middle Ages.
8. It will also be observed that there is not a single example of the small minuscule *s*, the long *s* being used throughout.



II.

CONFIRMATION OF A GRANT OF LANDS TO WILLIAM DE HERCESHEVED.
(WILLIAM DE MORVILLE, Constable of Scotland, died 1196.)



Sciant presentes et futuri quod ego Willelmus de Morville Constabularius Regni Scottorum concessi et hac carta mea confirmaui Willelmo de Herceshened totam terram quam Heden et Hemming tenuerunt in Herceshened scilicet in orientali parte uic qui tendit de Wedale in Derestre. Tenendum sibi et heredibus suis de hospitali sancte trinitatis de Solecre et fratribus ibidem deo seruientibus in feudo et hereditate ita libere quiete plene integre et honorifice sicut carta procuratoris de Solecre et fratrum eidem loci eidem Willelmo de Herceshened testatur et confirmatur saluo seruicio meo. Hijs Testibus

Christiana sponsa mea, Ketello de Letham, Willelmo Mansello, Henrico de Sample, Alano de Thirlestan, Petro de la Hago, Albino Capellano, Ricardo de Neh (?), Duncano filio Comit'is Duncani, Lugeram Harung, Ricardo Mansello, Alano de Clapham.

This is another beautiful little Charter which, so far as I can learn, has never before been reproduced, and which must have been written about the same time as No. I., William de Morville, Constable of Scotland, having died in 1196. While No. I. is executed in the Book Hand of the period however, as becomes a document emanating from the Royal Chancery, this deed, of a more private character, is written in the Cursive Hand then in vogue. Much that has been said regarding No. I. applies also to this hand; but it will be noticed that there is a decided tendency to run letters together, which is apt to cause confusion. The most flagrant examples of this habit occur in the *or* of *orientali*, and in the *nt* of the same word. Wherever these combinations appear also, throughout the Charter, the same tendency will be observed. Again, we have the *7* sign for *et*; and in *Constabularius* and *concessi* the *9* sign for *con* is applied. In *quod* we have an example of the first and last letters only being used as the contraction for a word. The curious combination for *scilicet* in the second line has been referred to in the text. (page 25). A still more corrupt form of the sign for *bus* or *us*, will be seen in *servientibus*, at the beginning of the fourth line. A few examples of the small minuscule *s* used at the beginning and end of words may be observed also in this deed. The conventional sign for *ur* which prevailed all through the Middle Ages will be seen in *futuri* and *testatur*. The names of the witnesses of such a deed as this are of primary importance to the Genealogist, and this very Charter exemplifies a few of the difficulties which have to be overcome. The name which I have transcribed as *Henricus de Sample*, for instance, is blotted, and must be guessed to

Facsimiles

some extent. The Genealogist, however, can generally do this with a fair approach to accuracy, as he usually has an idea beforehand of the name of the person or persons for whom he is in search. It will also be observed that one contracted name has puzzled me, viz., Ricardus de Neh. It is given by one authority as *Neth*, but the correctness of this interpretation is by no means certain, and none of the officials in the Register House, Edinburgh, would undertake to confirm that reading. In such a case *à-priori* information is absolutely essential to enable one to be confident of one's reading. The sign used here to indicate a contraction might really mean anything under the sun.

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REGISTRUM MAGNI SIGILLI REGUM SCOTTORUM.

[illegible]

Facsimiles

Carta Alexandri de Cokburn.

31. Daudid dei gracia rex Scottorum, omnibus probis hominibus tocius terre sue clericis et laicis salutem. Sciatis nos dedisse &c. dilecto nostro Alexandro de Cokburne viginti libras sterlingorum percipiendes annuatim de magna custuma burgo nostri Hadyngtona ad terminos vsuales. Tenendas et habendas eidem Alexandro et Margarete de Munfod sponse sue necnon heredibus inter ipsos procreandis quibus forte deficientibus heredibus dicti Alexandri quousque nos vel heredes nostri eosdem Alexandrum sponsam suam et heredes suos predictos de viginti libratibus terre in loco competenti in feodeauerimus hereditarie faciendo inde seruicium &c.

Carta J. de Redalle.

32. Daudid dei gracia rex Scottorum, omnibus &c. Sciatis nos dedisse, &c., dilecto et fideli nostro Johanni de Rydalle terras de Cranistona cum pertinentiis infra vicecomitatum de Edynburghe quas idem Johannes non vi aut metu ductus nec errore lapsus set mera et spontanea voluntate sua nobis per fustum et bacillum sursum reddidit pureque et simpliciter resignauit &c. Tenendis et habendis eidem Johanni et heredibus suis de corpore suo legitime procreatis seu procreandis quibus forte deficientibus dilecto et fideli nostro Daudid de Anandia militi et heredibus suis in feodo et hereditate per omnes rectas metas suas cum omnibus libertatibus &c. faciendo inde seruicium debitum et consuetum. In cuius rei &c. Testibus &c. Apud Edynburghe XXV^{to} die Januarii Anno Regni nostri tricesimo tercio &c.

Carta Roberti Senescalli de Schenbothi.

33. Daudid dei gracia rex Scottorum omnibus probis hominibus tocius terre sue clericis et laicis salutem. Sciatis nos dedisse &c. dilecto et fideli nostro Roberto Senescalli de Standbothchy terras de Daleel et de Modyrwalle cum pertinentiis infra vicecomitatum de Lanark nos contingentes pro eo quo heredes quondam Roberti Delwalle militis contra

pacem *et* fidem nostram in Anglia commorantur. Tenendas *et* habendas eidem Roberto *et* heredibus suis de corpore suo procreatis seu procreandis in liberam baroniam in moris mariciis &c. Adeo libere &c. Sicut quondam Malcolmus Flemyngus *et* predictus Robertus Delvalle milites ipsas terras cum pertinentiis aliquo tempore liberius &c. Tenuerunt seu possiderunt faciendo inde seruicium debitum *et* consuetum. In cuius rei &c. Testibus &c. Apud Edyuburghe vicesimo tercio die Marcii Anno Regni nostri trecesimo tercio.

Carta Margareta de Monfode.

34. David &c. Sciatis nos approbasse ratificasse donacionem illam *et* concessionem quas Margareta de Monfoode in sua viduitate fecit *et* concessit vni capellano divina perpetuo celebraturo in ecclesiam de Dunmanyne de annuo redditu novem Marcarum sterlingorum sibi debito de terris de Hopkelloche per Jacobum de Tvedi *et* heredes suos necnon de duabus marcis sterlingorum annuatim percipiendis de terris suis de Scraline proportionaliter ad terminos vsuales. Tenedis *et* habendis eidem capellano divina in perpetuum ut premittitur celebraturo in puram *et* perpetuam elemosinam adeo libere &c. Sicut carta sine litera predictae Margarete inde confecta in se plenius continet *et* proportat saluo seruicio nostro. In cuius rei &c. Apud Edynburghe nono die Marcii Anno Regni nostri xxxiiij.

This page from the first volume of the Register of the Great Seal of Scotland exemplifies the characteristic official hand of the fourteenth century, when, it will be seen, the Gothic style was predominant. The four Charters recorded upon the page in question are all dated in the thirty-second year of the reign of David II., viz., 1362—3, but the record may have been made some years later.

Facsimiles

The following points should be noted :—

1. The capital letters are highly ornamental and corrupt, as will be seen from the D of David, and the C of Cranstona in the second Charter.
2. *Cia* and *cio* are employed instead of *tia* and *tio*.
3. Here we have a form that is new to us— *et* for *etc.*
4. The very common termination of *orum* will also be seen in *sterlingorum*
5. In these Charters, some ancient and obsolete customs are recorded, as, for example, the form of investiture referred to in the second deed, *per fustem et bacillum*, which has reference to the feudal custom of giving a straw and a stick to symbolise the conveyance of the land, of which the Charter forms only the documentary evidence. These symbols which were not necessarily restricted to straw or staves, but which might consist of rings, stones, handfuls of earth, gloves, coins, books, and very often in the Middle Ages, a Bible, were carefully preserved, and usually affixed to the Act. The custom was a survival of a very ancient principle in Roman Law. It had its origin, of course, in the inability of primitive people to comprehend the abstract. They could not understand a conveyance in which something did not actually pass from hand to hand. The device of passing a part of the whole, or a visible symbol of the subject from the hand of the seller to that of the buyer, was therefore hit upon, thus making of the conveyance a concrete and formal action, which, if performed before witnesses, could not be disputed. Everything depended upon the formula, and a curious development of the custom was seen in the early Roman Law, when the action could be undone by repeating the forms,

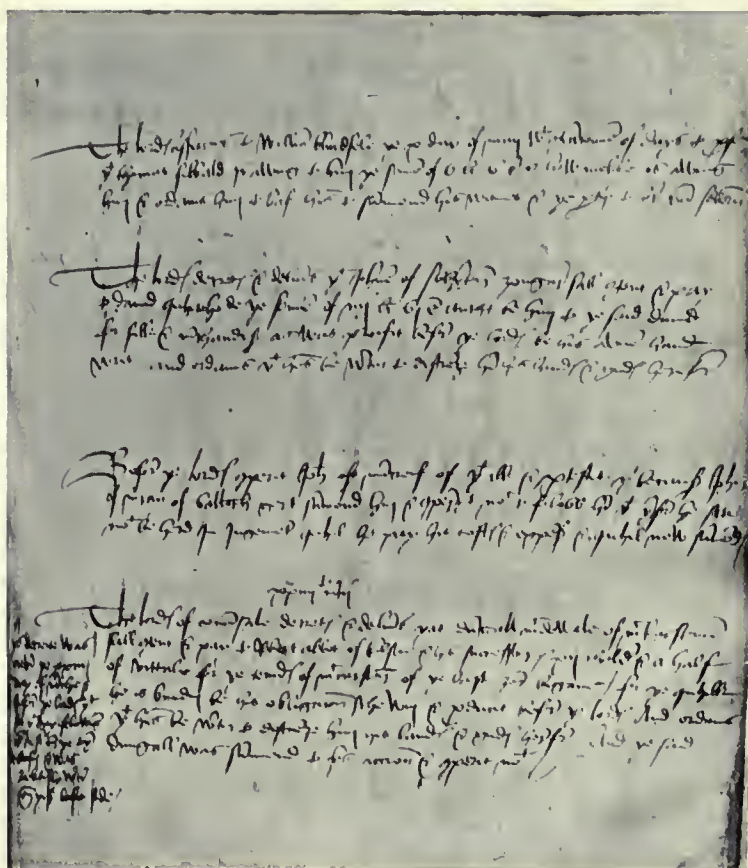
but instead of the responses being in the affirmative, they were then given in the negative.

6. The lateral compression of words and letters makes them difficult to read with fluency.
 7. A careful study of these deeds will elicit many forms of contraction to which frequent reference has been made both in the text and in these notes.
 8. Particular notice should be paid to the form of the *R* in *Rex*, *Redalle*, etc. This was the capital *R* form which persisted throughout the Middle Ages, and may be encountered in writings of a comparatively recent date. The *S* in *Sciatis* is also very common, and likewise persists down to comparatively modern times.
 9. The numerals will be referred to in the notes to Facsimile No. V.
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Facsimiles

IV.

ACTA DOMINORUM CONCILII. Vol. I., 1478.



The lordis assignis to William Blindsele ye X day of May wth continuacoune of days to profe y^e Thomas Sibbald is awing to him ye soume of V *li.* v s. or how mekle is awing him & ordanis him to hafe letters to summond his witnes & ye partye to here yaim sworn.

Facsimiles

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The lordis decretis & delivers y^t Johne of Swyntone zongar sall content & pay to Dauid Quhitehede ye some of iiij *℥* vi s. aucht be him to ye said Dauid for silk & merchandis as was prufit befor ye lordis be his awne hand writ and ordanis y^t letters be writin to distrenze him his landis & gudis herefor.

Befor ye lordis comperit Johne of Muncreif of y^t ilk & protestit y^t becaus Johne of Murray of Balloch gert summond him & comperyt not to folow him y^t yairfor he sall not be herd in jugement quhil he pay his costis & expensis & quhil new summondis.

xx iiij *to* July.

Yis decrete was gevin ye *xxliij* day of Merche & befor ye lordis y^t sat y^t day folowing thereafter on ye toyer side & was reklesly writin on yis side.

The lordis of Counsale decretis & delivers yat Dungall McDowale of McKarstounne sall content & pay to Robert Abbot of Kelson & his successouris *xij* chalder & a half of vittale for ye teindis of McCarstounne of ye last zer bigane for ye quhilk he is bundin be his obligaton schewin & producit befor ye lordis. And ordanis y^t letters be writin to destrenze him his landis & gudis herfor. And ye said Dungall was summond to yis action & comperit not.

We now come to the time when the handwritings were approaching their utmost depths of degradation. A glance at the above example, or at any one of the four which follow, will exemplify this in no unmistakeable manner. It is with such handwritings that the Genealogist will chiefly have to contend, and they must be patiently and carefully mastered. It will, however, be seen that the contractions are such as his study of the

earlier hands has already made him familiar with, and herein lies the principal value of the historical method which I have adopted in dealing with the subject. The student is now practically at liberty to concentrate his whole attention upon the formation of the letters and the idiosyncracies of individual scribes. All the examples which follow are written in the Scots dialect, which varies only to a slight degree from Old English, and the writings are selected from the official hands of the respective periods which were in a general sense common to the whole of Europe.

In transcribing, I have retained the ancient forms of *th* and *y*. The former is generally like our modern *y*, and is a survival and modification of the Anglo-Saxon *þ* = *th*. Examples will be found in almost every line of the facsimile—*ye*-the; *yat*-that; *yairfor*-therefore; *toyer*-tother, etc. I have also retained the abbreviated forms of *y^t*-that, and *w^t*-with, as they are usually written in that way even by the present day transcribers of ancient documents.

The *y* was written in the form of our *z*, as in *distrenze*, to distinguish it from the *y*-th. We have a survival of this custom in modern orthography in the proper name Dalziel, pronounced *Dalyell*.

The numerals in this example are badly written, as will be seen on comparing the 6 in the second line with the 6 in the following facsimile. At the first glance the former may be taken for the Arabic 6. On comparison with the same figure on the fifth line, however, they are found to be badly written examples of the Roman V. The Arabian numerals did not come into use until the close of the Middle Ages, and even then they were sparingly employed.

Great care must be taken in mastering such forms as those exemplified in the third word on the fourth line—*decretis*. In this word we have two shorthand devices, *ſ* = *ec*, and *ſ* = *et*, which were very common in cursive writings about this time, but unless they are

Facsimiles

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familiarised by the transcriber, they may cause him no end of trouble and worry.

Here also it is frequently difficult to tell whether such a continuation of the final stroke of a letter, as in judgement (Line 10), is meant to mark a contraction or is merely an ornamental flourish. In this case it marks the omission of the *n*, and stands for the conventional horizontal stroke usually employed to indicate such an omission. No rules can be given in this connection. Each transcriber must trust to his own common sense and reasoning powers.

The words which I have transcribed as *McKarstoune* and *McCarstoune*, are of course the ancient forms of the name of the village of Makerston, near Kelso.

Note also the contraction for *letters* in the third, seventh and fourteenth lines. This form was almost invariably employed, and further examples will be found in the facsimiles which follow.

Facsimiles

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MCBREK. Item the xiiij day of *Aprile* to *Sir* Andro Makbrek to dispone
be the king's *command* xl s̃.

Item ye samyn day be the king's *command* to ye freris of the
fery. xiiij s̃

Item ye xvj day of *Aprile* in Lestalryg giffin to ye king's
offerand xiiij s̃.

Item ye xxij day of *Aprile* in Kyſkendbricht giffin to ye
preistis *yair* be the king's *command* xx s̃.

Item to ye freris of Kyrkendbricht be the king's *command* to
by yame ane Eucharist vilj *Franch Crownis Suma* vliij s̃.

MAKBREK. Item ye samyn day in Quhithirn to *Sir* Andro Makbrek be
the king's *command* to dispone amang preistis v l̃t

Item yat *nycht* quhen the king com to Quhithirn to his
offerand at the towne and at the Reliques xviij s̃.

Item ye xxij day of *Aprile* in Quhithirn giffin to ye king's
offerandis at ye towne, Reliques, the hie altar, the Rude
altar and the chapel on the hill v *Franch Crownis Suma*

iiij l̃t x s̃.

MAKBREK. Item ye xxliij day of *Aprile* in Aire giffin to *Sir* Andro
Makbrek to dispone *yare* to preistis iiij l̃t.

Item ye samyn day to ye freris of Air be the king's
command xiiij s̃.

Item ye samyn *nycht* in Glasgo giffin to preistis in Glasgo be
the king's *command* iiij l̃t.

Suma lateris xxxviij l̃t xij s̃.

Facsimiles

This page from the Treasurer's Accounts of the Kingdom of Scotland is chiefly interesting on account of the numerals, the contractions and handwriting being practically identical with those in the previous facsimile. The only contractions to which special attention need be drawn are the conventional abbreviations for *Franch Crownis* and *Suma*. These occur from this time onward with little variation.

What I said in my notes to Facsimile No. IV. regarding the numerals, is entirely borne out by the present illustration as well. Roman numerals are at this period employed throughout. In the seventh facsimile, written sixty years later, the Arabian figures will be seen, however, gradually coming into use, being employed there, to indicate the date of the year, while the day of the month is still given in the Roman characters. Other and still more frequent examples will also be found in the eighth reproduction, of date 120 years later, where we have such mixtures as *viiij C Lxth 6/8*.

In connection with the Roman numeration, the following notes may prove useful :—

- (a) Instead of *IV*, *IIII* or *iiij* was always written, and *IX*, was invariably *viiij*. We also occasionally find *or* over-written above the *iiij*, being the terminal letters of *quatuor*. Analogously we have ^{em}*X* for *decem*.
- (b) 80 was often written *iiij^{xx}*, and 90, *iiij^{xx} x*. Thus, 92 would be *iiij^{xx} x ii*.
- (c) 100 was usually *C*, but occasionally *v^{xx}*.
- (d) 1,000 was generally the uncial *M*, *Ϟ*, but 500 was frequently *℥*, the explanation being that it was half of *Ϟ*.

(e) The M, signifying 1,000, was also frequently indicated by the horizontal stroke written above the preceding figure or figures, that being, as we know, the sign for an omitted M. Thus $\overline{XXX}$ would stand for 30,000.

(f) S (*semi*) was frequently placed after the numeral to express a half, as $\text{L S} = 50\frac{1}{2}$

When the Arabian numerals came into use, they underwent a wide variety of shapes from age to age. A fairly complete list of these, as well as of the curious combinations which the Roman figures frequently took, may be found in Cappelli's *Dizionario*, to which reference has been made in the text, and to which those interested should refer.

Great care must be exercised in respect of the Cursive form of X. As will be seen from the present facsimile, it is frequently very similar to the small Cursive *p*, and appearing, as it sometimes does, in the text of a document, it is frequently mistaken for that latter, with the usual resulting confusion and error.



Vigesimo quinto Augusti Anno
quinquagesimo sexto.

In *presence* of ye lordis of Counsale comperit Maister David Borthwik procurato^r specialie constitat for ane venerabill lady Elezabeth priores of Hadingtoun, Patrik Congiltoun of yat ilk, Patrik Cokburn of Newbiggin his tutor, Elezabeth Hepburn and Williame Chirnsyid hir spous. And siclik comperit personalie Henry Congiltoun, Andro Congiltoun, James Congiltoun and Patrik Congiltoun and gaif in yis declaratioun of will efter following, subscryvit w^t yair handis as is efter specifyt, and desyrit ye samin to be insert and registrat in ye buikis of Counsale, and to haif ye strenth of ane act and decreit of ye lordis yairof in tyme to cum, and yai to interpone yair auctority yairto, and executoriallis to pas yairupoun, and yai to be chargit to obtempir and fulfill ye samin in all poyntis efter ye forme & tenno^r yairof, the quhilk desyre ye saidis lordis thocht ressonable and ordanit ye said declaratioun of will to be insert and registrat in ye saidis bukis and to haif ye strenth of ane act and decreit of ye lordis yairof in tyme to cum and interponis yair auctority yairto and executoriallis to pas yairupoun, and yai to be chairgit to obtempir and fulfill ye samin in all poyntis efter ye forme & tenno^r yairof of ye quhilk ye tenno^r followis — We Elezabet, Prioires of Hadingtoun having ye haill causis, actionis, and debaittis depending betuix Patrik Congiltoun of yat ilk, Patrik Cokburn of Newbiggin his tuto^r for his entries, Elezabet Hepburne and Williame Chirnsyid hir spous, and ye said Patrik Cokburn as cautioner & souertie for ye said Elezabeth and hir said spous, that yai sall stand and abyid at ye deliuerance of ws in ye mater efter specifyt, and Henry Congiltoun, James, Andro, Johne and Patrik Congiltouns breyer to vnquhile Robert Congiltoun of yat ilk submitted to ws our will and deliuerance be ye said Patrik Congiltoun of yat ilk and ye said tuto^r for his entries, and ye said Elezabeth for hir self in name & behalf of hir said spous, and ye said Patrik Cokburne as cautioner yat yai suld hald firme and stabill our said deliuerance and will, and be ye saidis Henry and James be yame

selfis and ye said Henry takand ye burding vpoun him for ye remanent of his saidis breyer promittand & oblissand yame to fulfill.

Such Records as those from which this page has been photographed furnish, as may be gathered from the most superficial perusal of it, a perfect gold mine for the Genealogical searcher, and to such Registers too much attention can scarcely be given. The present facsimile is a characteristic example of the form and manner of document that must be very frequently consulted by the working Genealogist, and it really presents few difficulties to the patient transcriber. Contractions are practically non-existent, while the few that do occasionally slip in, are of a conventional and familiar character. The writing also is plain, and after a few typical peculiarities have been mastered, can usually be read as easily as a letter written in the twentieth century. Since this page was photographed, a Memorandum of a Grant bearing upon the history of my own family, executed in Latin in the Connty of Middlesex, in the year 1554, has come into my possession. I have subjected it to a careful comparison with the present facsimile, and after allowing for the differences incidental to a photographic reproduction, and to documents executed in different languages, the two hands and styles are so closely similar that they both might well have been produced by the same scribe, thus bearing out in quite a remarkable manner what I have already stated regarding the universality of writings produced throughout Europe, about the same period.

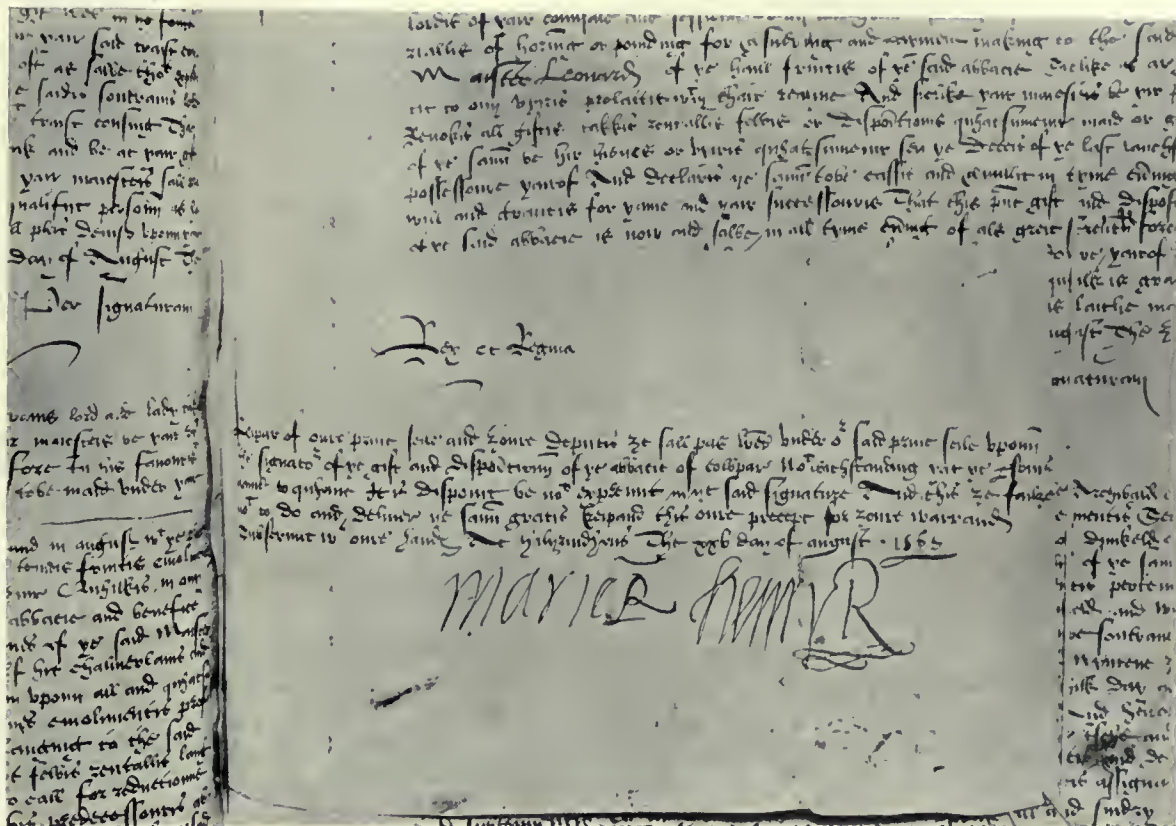
The only points in the document itself which call for particular mention, are (1). the curious contraction *brey* for *brether* in the last line, and elsewhere throughout the facsimile; and (2), the contraction *vmqle* for *umquhile*, meaning the *late* or *deceased*, in the eighth line from the foot, which is one very common in Scottish documents and generally appearing in this particular form.

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VII.

Letter (Autograph) from Mary, Queen of Scots, and her consort, Lord Darnley, inserted in *Registrum Secreti Sigilli Regum Scottorum*, Vol. 33.



REX ET REGINA.

Keipar of our priue seile and your deputis. Ze sall pas letteres vnder our said priue seile vpoun the signato^r of ye gift and dispoition of ye abbacie of Cowpar notwithstanding yat ye personis named to quhome it is dispoit be no^t exprenit in ye said signature, and this ze failze no^t to do and deliuer ye samin gratis, keipand this our precept

for zoure warrand. Subscriuit w^t oure handis at Halyrudhous. The xxv day of August, 1565.

MARIE R. HENRY R.

This most interesting letter of Mary Stuart and her husband Darnley, is pasted into a volume of *Registrum Secreti Sigilli Regum Scottorum*, part of the ordinary text of which executed in the same handwriting as that of the letter, has come into the plate. I have not transcribed this surrounding matter, and the learner will find it excellent practice to do so on his own account. I will be glad to clear up any difficulties that may arise, though there appear to be none on the face of the document.

This is quite a different hand from that employed in the last example, and the tendency is fast setting towards the ridiculous and corrupt forms which became fixed and known as the Court and Chancery Hands. Still, it is plain and easy to read, and presents no difficulties whatever in the matter of contractions. It will have been observed in this and the three preceding reproductions, that *u* and *v* are now constantly interchangeable, and, as a general rule, where we should write a *v* a *u* appears in these writings, and *vice-versâ*. Here we have also several notable examples of the employment of *z* for *y*. In the first line the word *ze* is clearly our *ye*. In the third line, also, we have the same word with *failze* immediately following, and in the second last line *zoure* is written for *youre*. The word *and* in the third line, and *at* in the fifth, might have given trouble to a beginner, but these are merely peculiarities of the writer.

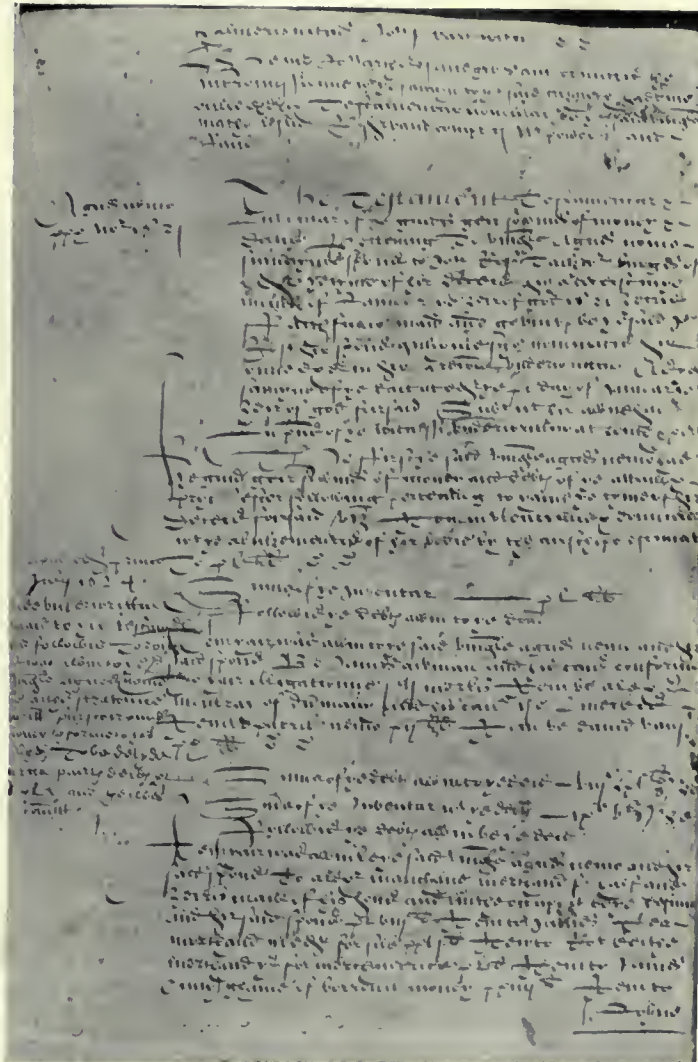
The signatures have quite a modern aspect compared with the document itself. It was just about this period that the Italian or modern style of writing was coming into use, and it was in no small degree due to Queen Mary, who learned it, with so many other arts and accomplishments during her sojourn in France, that it latterly became the customary and standard handwriting in this country. Some of the Queen's private letters are written in this style throughout, and might be taken, so far as the caligraphy is concerned, for the efforts of a boy in the fourth or fifth standard of an average board school at the present day.

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VIII.

REGISTER OF TESTAMENTS. EDINBURGH COMMISSARIOT.



Facsimiles

Chalmeris, Witnes. Jon Fochart, Witnes. We Master's Jon Arthour &c. and gives and comittis the intromissioun w^t ye samyn to ye said Elizabeth Haddine onlie executrix, testamentar nominat be ye said vmquhile Matho Leslie reservand compt &c. W^t power &c. and fand.

Agnes Nemo
xxx No^r 1621.

The Testament Testamentar & Inventar of ye guidis, geir, sowmes of money & debtis pertening to vmquhile Agnes Nemo sumetyme spous to Jon. Ros, Tailzor, burges of *Edinburgh* ye tyme of hir deceis quha deceest in ye moneth of Januar ye Zeir of God 1621 Zeiris faithfullie maid and gevin vp be ye said Jon Ros hir spous quhome scho nominatis hir onlie executer in hir lattu will vnderwritin as ye samyne of ye dait at *Edinburgh* ye xi day of Januar ye Zeir of God forsaid. Sub^t w^t hir awne hand in *presens* of ye witnesses vnderwritten at length *proportis*.

In ye ffirst ye said vmquhile Agnes Nemo had ye guidis, geir, sowmes of money and debtis of ye awaillis & pryces efter following, pertening to yame ye tyme of hir deceis fairsaid, viz.: Item, in vtenceillis & domicileillis w^t ye abulzementis of hir bodie by the airschiipe estimat.

Apud *Edinburgh* primo
July 1624.

Eike vnderwritten maid
to yis testament as fol-
lowis, To witt, yair was
awin to ye said vmquhile
Agnes Nemo be Artho^r
Stratonne, writter four
scoir pundis money con-
forme to his obligatioun,

To x1 *tit.*

Suma of ye Inventar——— x1 *tit.*

Followis ye debtis awin to ye dead.

Item, yair was awin to ye said vmquhile Agnes Nemo and hir said spous, Be James Aikman and his cauris conforme to yair obligatioun j M Merkis. Item, be Alexr. Moubray of *Dummany* and his cauris

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be devydit n tua
pairt's deid's pairt is

x*l* *℥* and geiwes
and committis &c.

9*c* L Merkis. Item be Patrik Nemo x*ij* *℥*.

Item be David Vaus xx *℥*.

Suma of ye debt's awin to ye deid,

viiij c lxx *℥* 6/8.

Suma of ye Inventar w^t ye debt's i x c v *℥* 6/8.

Followis ye debt's awin be ye deid.

Item, yair was awin be ye said vinq^uhile Agnes
Nemo and hir said spous to Alexr. Mauchane,
Merchand for half ane Zeiris maile of his house and
buithe occupyit be ye defunc and hir said spous
x*lv* iiij *℥*. Item to James Rea, Merchand in
Edinb^urg^h for silk xxv *j* *℥*. Item to Robert Keithe,
Merchand yair for Merchandrice x*l* *℥*. Item, to
James Cunynghame of borrouit money xx iiij *℥*.
Item, to Johne.

Here we have a particularly flagrant example of the corrupt Chancery Hand of the period, and this facsimile must be carefully studied and the forms thoroughly mastered. The capitals are especially troublesome, and almost every scribe exercised his ingenuity in an apparent effort to make them as illegible as possible. The W in the second line, and the I scattered throughout the document are cases in point. The word *proportis*, at the end of line 17, should be noted. The curious hieroglyphic *℥* stands, of course, for *℥*, the contraction for *pro*, and the downward stroke at the end of the word, with which we are now perfectly familiar, is the conventional contraction for *is*. Here also we have

Facsimiles

further examples of *y* standing for *th*, and *z* for *y*. Observe also the *A* of *Agnes* in the margin. The cross stroke being absent makes it sometimes liable to be taken for an N or other letter.

It will be noticed in this photograph that faint marks of writing appear upon the blank spaces. This has apparently been caused by the volume having been closed while the opposite page was still wet, but it may be well here to point out that such marks, especially on vellum, do not always indicate this as a probable cause. Frequently, when vellum was scarce and expensive, scribes took older MSS., and after partially or wholly obliterating the former text, executed the new deed upon the parchment thus cleaned. These were called palimpsests, and however well the obliterating process had been accomplished, traces of the former writing, more or less faint, were generally left; or, through the action of the atmosphere or from other causes, again made their appearance. Some of the most remarkable discoveries of portions of works which were supposed to have been irretrievably lost, have been made by means of palimpsests, and it is in fact to such discoveries that we owe our possession of the *De Republica* of Cicero, the *Institutes* of Gaius, and many other invaluable fragments of Classical and Juristic writings. Genealogists should always be on the look out for such documents, and if it should be suspected that any particular writing has been made on a palimpsest, steps should at once be taken to have the suspicion definitely confirmed or refuted. It is always well to have such documents photographed in the first instance, and the application of hydro-sulphuret of Ammonia as a re-agent to the document might safely be made.

In conclusion, a word or two here regarding the Court and Chancery Hands, which are peculiar to Britain, may not be out of place. The former persisted from the time of the early Tudors till the reign of George II. At first it was rather elegant though corrupt, but, as time went on, the strokes became thicker and coarser, and by the end of the seventeenth century it was by no means a beautiful hand. Its chief characteristics are its angularity, its lateral com-

pression, and the ornamentation of its capitals which was carried to extremes utterly ridiculous and absurd. The G, O and S were very similar, and must be carefully distinguished— $\Phi = G$; $\Phi = O$; $\Theta = S$. The T also was rendered unlike the ordinary Old English form of such a letter by the mere addition of a perpendicular stroke † . The capital F consisted of two small *fs*; and small *b*, capital K and capital R were also all very similar— $\text{B} = \text{L}$; $\text{K} = \text{K}$; $\text{R} = \text{R}$; *c* was d , and *t*, d ; *g*, *x* and *y* also must not be confused, $\text{g} = \text{g}$; $\text{x} = \text{x}$; $\text{y} = \text{y}$. But the most troublesome letter of all is *e*, which originally was written Θ , the inner stroke, however, gradually degenerated to a mere dot Θ ; Θ ; and the letter is continually being taken for an O.

The Chancery Hands originated about the beginning of the seventeenth century, and are perpetuated in the legal engrossing hands of the present day. Anyone accustomed to them will have no difficulty whatever with this style of writing. The remarks I have made above regarding the Court Hands apply also, though to a much less degree, to the Chancery Hands, and perhaps we see it at its very worst in the facsimile here given. A mastery of that document will indeed leave few difficulties to be overcome, and with practice and perseverance the student should before long be in the happy position of being able to read with fluency any document that may fall into his hands, provided the writing be in any one of the Latin styles, and at least tolerably legible. One point is worth keeping carefully in mind in reading old documents, viz., certain formulas are common to them all, and they vary very little from the earliest times. The most common of these is, of course, the introductory name, designation and titles of the king or person conferring the grant. These are not infrequently known to the searcher already, and they thus serve as a key to all that succeeds. In an Exemplification of Recovery of 15 James I, which I have before me as I

write, for example, the opening formula is as follows—"Jacobus Dei Gratia Angliæ, Scotie, Francie et Hibernie Rex, Fidei Defensor, &c." The first four words are written in an ornamental book hand, and are easily read, and are valuable, as they suggest what is likely to follow. That is in the Court Hand of the period, and by studying the letters of those words already known, one is enabled to acquire a knowledge of the letters at once and to spell out the rest of the document with comparative ease.

There may be some who, living at a distance from a library where further practice in the reading of ancient documents may be obtained, yet are desirous of continuing the study, should it be possible to procure a suitable collection of facsimiles at a reasonable price. To such, it is not an easy matter to give profitable advice. Nearly all the best reproductions are foreign, and such as we in England do possess, are either excessively expensive, or serve to illustrate only short particular periods. I regret, therefore, my inability to recommend to these students a British publication, but there was published by Messieurs. Alphonse Picard et Fils, 82, Rue Bonaparte, Paris, about five years ago, such a general collection as will suit the purpose of all earnest students of the science. It bears the title *Recueil de Fac-Similés d'Écritures du X^e au XVII^e Siècle*; consists of 50 admirable reproductions of carefully-selected MSS.; is accompanied by transcriptions made by the learned Professor of *l'école Nationale des Chartes*; and costs only 20 Francs (16/- nett.) I do not believe it possible to get anywhere a more representative series at so low a price, and I know from personal experience that any student who uses this collection as a basis for his further study will be amply repaid by the possession of these beautiful reproductions, and by the added knowledge of the subject which he cannot fail to acquire from a careful study of them.

KL. 5-7-66

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