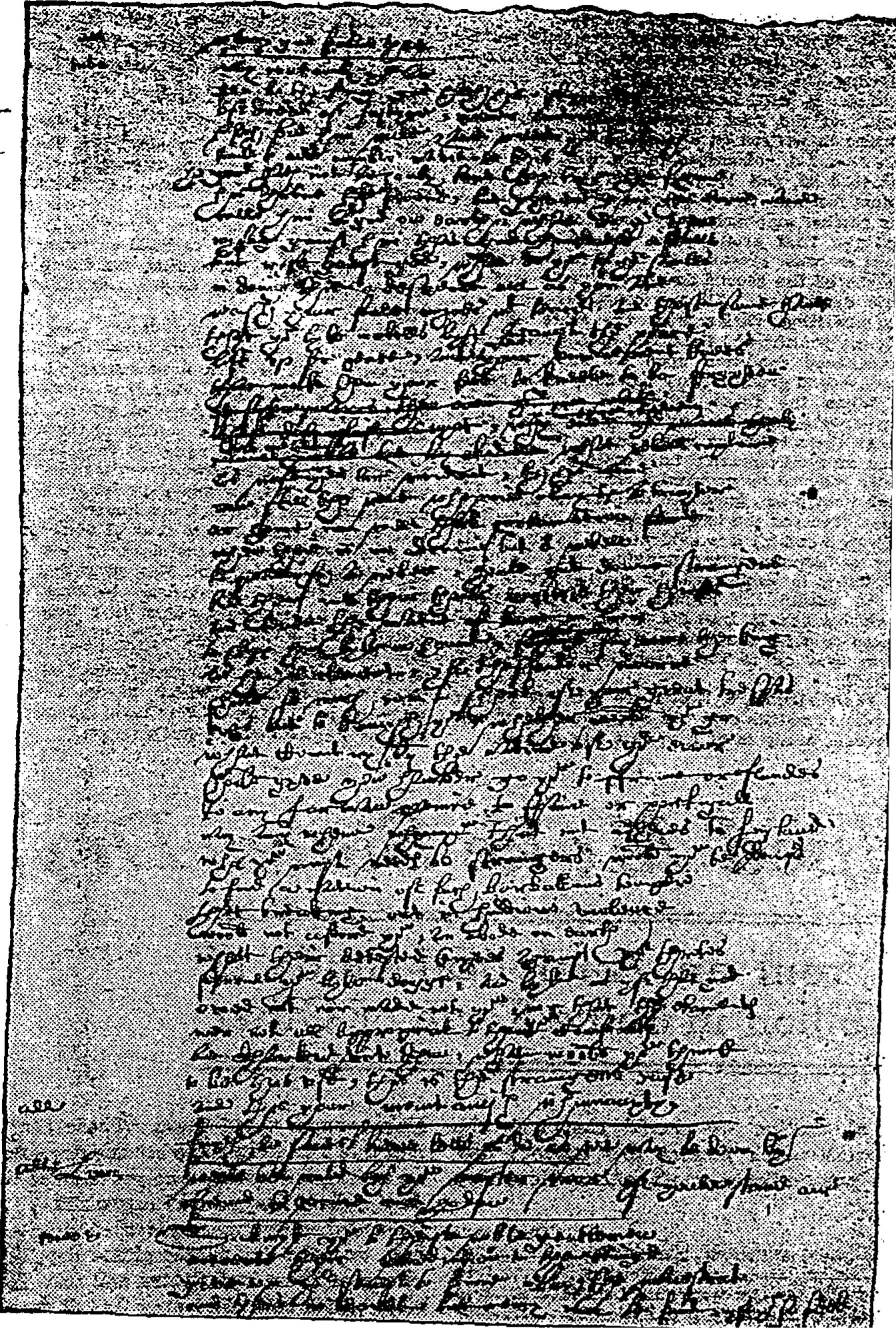


Is This Manuscript in Shakespeare's Writing?



Page of the Play "Sir Thomas More," Said to be in Shakespeare's Handwriting.

THE age-long search for a manuscript in William Shakespeare's own handwriting has been successful, according to Sir Edward Maunde Thompson, who has written a monograph, published by the Oxford Press and illustrated by facsimile reproductions of three pages of dramatic writing, to prove the genuineness of the find. An interesting incidental fact is that these pages have been in the British Museum for years. If they had been a bear they would have bitten you.

They are not a part of any of Shakespeare's own plays, not even of the doubtful writings that have been attributed to him, but form an addition written by Shakespeare for the play of "Sir Thomas More," by Anthony Munday. The third of the three pages is reproduced with this article, together with the key or translation, and the six known signatures of Shakespeare which Sir Edward Thompson used comparatively in arriving at his conclusions as to the hand-

writing of the "Sir Thomas More" fragment.

Sir Edward's delight in his proof is supplemented by the recollection of a prophecy he made years ago concerning the writing of Shakespeare and that of Paul the Apostle. He refers to that in the following preface to the monograph:

An invitation from the Delegates of the Clarendon Press to contribute a chapter on handwriting to Shakespeare's England, a work which they then had in contemplation, first turned my serious attention to the subject of Shakespeare's penmanship, and led me to study the few authentic signatures that have survived from his hand. This study proved more productive than I had dared to hope. The general results have been published in the book above mentioned. But it was thought that so interesting a subject as Shakespeare's handwriting might with advantage be treated in fuller detail; and with this view the present monograph has been written—a strictly paleographical study, altogether eschewing criticism of a literary nature.

My researches in due course led to an examination of the well-known addition, written in an unidentified hand, to the MS. play of "Sir Thomas More," now the Harleian MS. 7368 in the British Museum. Nearly half a century has passed since, in 1871, this addition was brought to public notice in a contribution to Notes and Queries by the Shakespearean student Richard Simpson, who suggested that it was an autograph composition of Shakespeare. This attribution could not be substantiated at the time; the key of the problem was still undiscovered. When I lately renewed acquaintance with the Harleian MS., it was with a lively interest that I recognized in the handwriting of the addition certain features which I had already noted in Shakespeare's signatures. A careful study of the MS. ensued; and in this monograph I have set out my reasons for concluding that at length we have found what so many generations have vainly desired to behold—a holograph MS. of our great English poet.

The memory of the early years of a long official life in the service of the Trustees of the British Museum recalls a twofold forecast, hazarded in the enthusiasm of youth and the confidence of inexperience, that we might live to see the day when a papyrus roll, inscribed with one of the Epistles of St. Paul within measurable distance of the Apostle's lifetime, might be rescued from some early Egyptian Christian's tomb; and when one of Shakespeare's original MSS. might emerge from the forgotten lumber of some old Warwickshire manor house. The Pauline papyrus still lies, if at all, under the swathing bandages of its mummied owner; but, in this age of astounding recoveries of Greek literature—classical and Biblical—which the exploration of the land

Expert Believes Pages of a Play, "Sir Thomas More," Were Written by the Bard's Own Hand

all
moor

merry god forbid that

nay certainly yo^u ar

for to the king god hath his offyc lent
of dread of Iustyce, power and Comaund
hath bid him rule, and willd yo^u to obay
and to add ampler matie to this

he [god] hath not [le] souly lent the king his figure
his throne [hys] & sword, but gyven him his owne name^e
calls him a god on earth, what do yo^u then
rysing gainst him that god himsealf enstalls
but ryse gainst god, what do yo^u to yo^r sowles
in doing this o desperat [ar] as you are.
wash your foule mynds w^t teares and those same hande.
that yo^u lyke rebels lyft against the peace
lift vp for peace, and your vnreuerent knees
[that] make them your feet to kneele to be forgyven
[is safer warrs, then euer yo^u can make]

[in in to yo^r obedienc] s
[whose discipline is ryot; why euen yo^r [warre] hurly]

tell me but this

[cannot pceed but by obedienc] what rebell captaine
as mutynes ar incident, by his name
can still the rout who will obay [th] a traytor
or howe can well that pclamation sounde
when ther is no adicion but a rebell
to quallyfy a rebell, youle put downe straingers
kill them cutt their throts: possesse their howses
and leade the matie of lawe in liom

to slipp him lyke a hound; [alas alas]
[saying] say nowe the king
as he is clement, yf thoffendor moorne
should so much com to short of your great trespass
as but to banysh yo^u, whether woold yo^u go.
what Country by the nature of yo^r error
should gyve you harber go yo^u to ffraunc or flanders
to any [arman] pvince, [to] spane or portigall
nay any where [why yo^u] that not adheres to Inghland
why yo^u must neede be straingers, woold yo^u be pleasd
to find a nation of such barbarous temper
that breaking out in hiddious violence
woold not afoord yo^u, an abode on earth
whett their detested knyves against yo^r throtes
spume yo^u lyke dogge, and lyke as yf that god
owed not nor made not yo^u, nor that the clemente,
wer not all appropriat to [ther] yo^r Comforte.
but Charterd vnto them, what woold yo^u thinck
to be thus vsd, this is the straingers case
and this your mountanish inbumanyty.

all

[all] Lince

fyth a saics trewe letts vs do as we may be doon by
weele be ruld by yo^u master moor yf youle stand our
freind to pcure our pdon

moor

Submyt yo^u to these noble gentlemen
entreate their mediation to the kinge
gyve vp yo^r sealf to forme obay the maiestrate
and thers no doubt, but mercy may be found yf yo^u so seek

The Page Deciphered.

of Egypt is so generously yielding, who shall dare to say that such a treasure lies beyond our reach? And, as for the Shakespearean MS., who could have made bold, any time within these last hundred and sixty years, to proclaim that he who would set eyes upon it need only raise his hand and take it down from its shelf in the Department of Manuscripts of the British Museum?

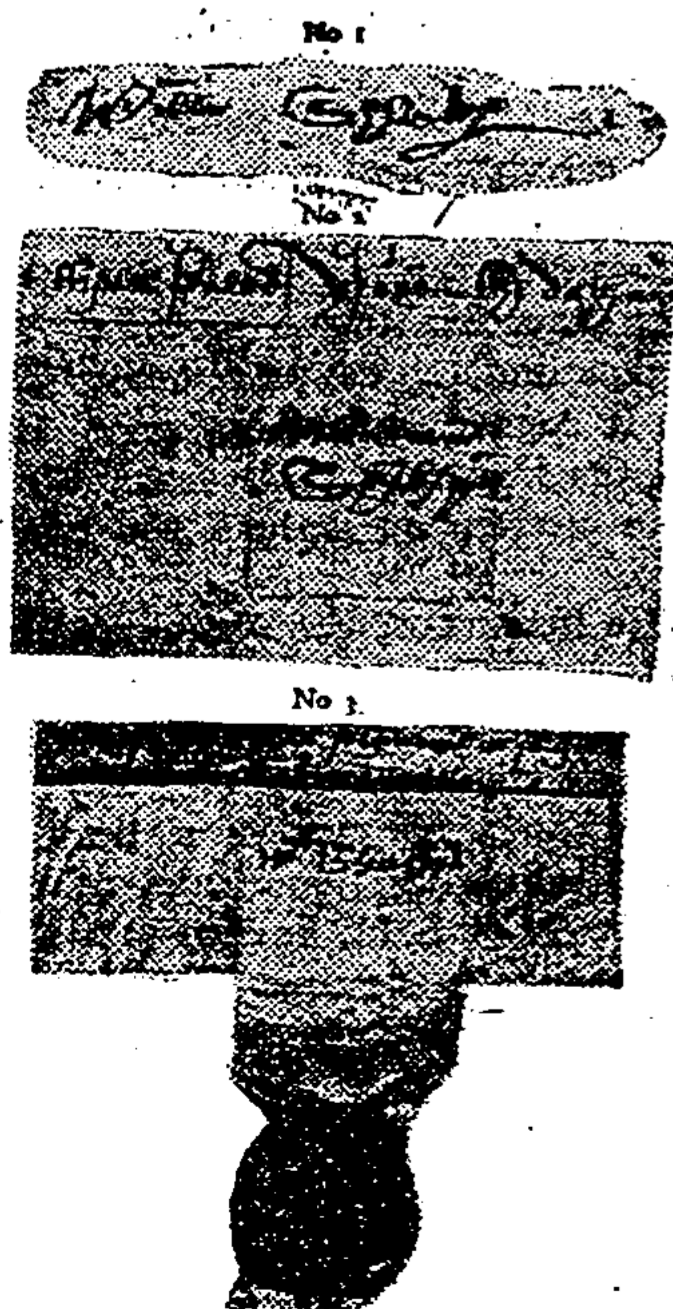
I close this note with the fullest expression of my obligations to my old friend and sometime colleague Alfred William Pollard, whose wide knowledge of Shakespearean bibliography and literature is so willingly imparted to those who seek his help.

In explanation of the long delay in identifying the addition to the play of Anthony Munday, the writer of the monograph has this to say concerning the meagreness of the material with which to work before the finding of the sixth signature of Shakespeare, which is numbered one in the accompanying reproductions:

The subject of Shakespeare's handwriting has never been submitted to a thorough and systematic study; and the reason for this neglect is not far to seek. Down to a quite recent date five authentic signatures of the dramatist constituted the only recognized material on which to found an opinion or to attempt to build up a theory as to the character of the hand that he wrote; and of these five signatures two had been evidently subscribed under conditions restraining the freedom of the hand, and the remaining three were written when he was already stricken with mortal sickness.

In these circumstances, to have attempted to solve the problem of reconstituting, with any plausible probability, the kind of handwriting in which Shakespeare committed his literary creations to paper might have been justly regarded as a presumptuous undertaking which could only prove barren in results and a futile waste of time.

But the discovery in 1910 by Dr. C. W. Wallace, in the course of his researches in the Public Record Office, of a sixth signature has altered the condition of things. By means of this signature, written with a free



SHAKESPEARE'S SIGNATURES TO THREE;
LEGAL DOCUMENTS, 1612, 1613,
PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE, GUILDHALL LIBRARY,
LONDON

hand, we now know that Shakespeare was capable of writing in fluent style; and we recover the key of this leading factor of the problem.

The material on which we have to work is meagre, but we start with one advantage. We can confine our survey to a single style of calligraphy. Shakespeare was born of provincial parents, citizens of a small country town in the midlands, and was being taught in the grammar school of his native Stratford-upon-Avon when his father's declining fortunes led to the boy's withdrawal, probably in 1577, to help, it is said, in his father's trade, at the early age of 13 years—a period of life when learning is slender and the handwriting is usually still unformed. But we know the character of the writing that Shakespeare was taught. In the course of the sixteenth century the handwriting of the educated classes in England was undergoing a radical change. The old native style—a rugged and tortuous style—was gradually giving place to the new Italian hand, founded on the reformed style of the calligraphers of the Italian renaissance, the beauty and simplicity of which insured in the end its general acceptance.

At the time when Shakespeare was at school the new hand had made its way in England so far that the more highly educated were masters of it as well as of the native hand—they could write in either style. But progress is always slower in the provinces than in the capital, and the evidence of extant specimens of the handwriting of Shakespeare's actual contemporaries shows that the writing masters of Stratford were still teaching the old English hand, and that hand alone.

Shakespeare's six authentic signatures

are subscribed to the following documents:

1. His deposition in a lawsuit brought by Stephen Bellott against his father-in-law, Christopher Montjoy, a Huguenot "tire maker" of Silver Street, near Wood Street, in the City of London, with whom Shakespeare lodged about the year 1604; dated 11th May, 1612. (Recently discovered by Dr. C. W. Wallace in the Public Record Office.)

2. Conveyance of a house in Blackfriars, London, purchased by Shakespeare; 10th March, 1613. (Now in the Guildhall Library.)

3. Mortgage deed of the same property; 11th March, 1613. (Now in the British Museum.)

4-6. Shakespeare's will, written on three sheets of paper, with his signature at the foot of each one; executed 25th March, 1616. (Now in Somerset House.)

The book adds:

The six signatures—one of them prefaced by the words "By me"—present a meagre total of fourteen words. Subscribed within the last four years of Shakespeare's life, between the 11th of May, 1612, and the 25th of March, 1616, they suffice to prove that at the close of his career he still wrote the native English hand which he had been taught at school.

The actual signatures, so far as the letters are concerned but without incidental remarks added by the writer, are:

1. Willm Shaks
2. William Shaksper
3. Wm Shakspe
4. William Shakspeare
5. Willm Shakspeare
6. By me William Shakespeare

The Christian name is written indifferently in a shortened form or at full length, following the ordinary practice of all modern times. It will, however, be noticed that in each of the first three signatures the surname is written in a shortened form; while in Nos. 4-6, subscribed to the will, it is subscribed at full length. The six signatures thus fall into two groups; and this grouping is further emphasized by the fact that those of the first group were written when the writer was presumably in normal health; those of the second group, when he was on his death bed. All are conscious how our handwriting varies with the state of our bodily health; and the effect of Shakespeare's weakened condition upon his signatures in the second group is very painfully manifest.

When the three signatures of the first group are submitted to examination, we find that their value as witnesses to the character of Shakespeare's handwriting is materially reduced by accidental circumstances. In the first place, from the manner in which he has executed the two Blackfriars documents, (Nos. 2 and 3,) it is evident that he imagined, as a layman might imagine, that he was obliged, in each case, to confine his signature within the bounds of the parchment label which is inserted in the foot of the deed to carry the seal, and not to allow it to run over on to the parchment of the deed itself.

With signature No. 1 we are on firmer ground, and its evidence for the object of our present study is of first-rate importance.

Sir Edward then goes on to analyze each of the six signatures letter by letter with due regard to the conditions prevailing for each of the six occasions on which Shakespeare wrote his name. He then does the same thing with the individual letters in the "Sir Thomas More" fragment and adds:

Having now analyzed the handwriting of this addition to the play of "Sir Thomas More," we are at length in a position to consider whether the signatures of Shakespeare, which have been the subject of the first part of this study, and the three pages of this addition have been made to yield sufficient internal evidence to prove that the documents are in the handwriting of one and the same person.

The problem is not an ordinary one; it is not a simple matter of deciding whether a particular MS. is in a handwriting already ascertained, of which abundant specimens are extant as material for comparison. Here we have to establish the identity of the handwriting of these three pages of the Harleian MS. with another handwriting altogether unknown to us but for the survival of a few signatures, half of which are imperfect. The task may be compared to that of attempting to identify a face in the dark by the dim light of a lucifer match. But, notwithstanding the difficulties, we venture to think that sufficient close resemblances have been detected to bring the two handwritings together and to identify them as coming from one and the same hand. Personally we feel confident that in this addition to the play of "Sir Thomas More" we have indeed the handwriting of William Shakespeare.