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Baker: Law of Disputed and Forged Documents

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LAW OF DISPUTED AND FORGED DOCUMENTS. By *J. Newton Baker*. Charlottesville, Va.: Michie Co. 1955. Pp. viii, 560. \$15.

Can your signature be successfully forged? What are the various ways of forging an instrument? How can a forgery be detected? These are only a few of the many questions that arise in the trial of a case involving a forged document and which are fully and clearly answered in this book, recently off the press.

Dr. J. Newton Baker, the author, enjoys a dual distinction. He is a member of the bar of Washington, D.C. and is also recognized as a

handwriting expert and examiner of disputed documents. He has actively participated for more than a quarter of a century as an expert witness in some of the most famous cases. He is justly recognized as a leading authority, and the book reflects his searching inquiry.

It is not a light book to read or to digest. There is a great deal of technical information that may not interest the average lawyer, but which is very useful to students of handwriting, for example, the discussion of quality of lines, causes of variations, size, pressure of pen and proportion of writing.

Dr. Baker is a student of handwriting and yielded to irresistible temptation in tracing the history of forgery in ancient Rome, under the English common law and in the medieval ecclesiastical courts, in modern England, under the French and German Codes, and finally under the law of the American states. A great deal of space is thus devoted to historical material of interest only to the student. However, once over the "hump" Dr. Baker plunges into the subject with scientific thoroughness. The pages become factual and practical. He is a stimulating instructor in the preparation of a case and guides the lawyer step by step in best presenting his case to the jury. The importance of the camera and the microscope is not minimized. Over one hundred illustrations of questioned exhibits are reproduced.

Included in the famous trials discussed in the book is the celebrated Lindbergh case. It will be remembered that anonymous letters were written by the kidnapper, Bruno Richard Hauptmann, demanding fifty thousand dollars for the return of the Lindbergh infant. Although the writing was deliberately disguised, the handwriting experts who testified demonstrated scientifically with enlarged photographs that beyond any doubt the defendant wrote those notes. It was their testimony which helped send Hauptmann to the electric chair. Justice Parker, who presided at the trial, stated:

"The identification of the handwriting on all the ransom notes, including the one left on the window sill of the nursery window, is that of Hauptmann. The peculiarities of expression and spelling common to all these notes are contained in the admittedly genuine writings of Hauptmann. It is likewise an inescapable inference that the writer of the ransom note on the window sill entered the nursery and perpetrated the crime."

Not every case cited by the author has the emotional impact and drama of the Lindbergh trial. However, there are enough cases in this book to convince the reader of the tremendous contribution which the handwriting expert makes in solving such problems. There is a vague feeling among members of the bar that it is futile to retain a competent and well-qualified handwriting expert. A reading of this book will convert the most skeptical lawyer. He will be amazed to learn of the hundreds of cases listed, from petty larceny to murder in the first degree, which were solved through the unspectacular and prosaic work of the handwriting expert.

The book contains an excellent bibliography, table of cases, illustrations from actual cases tried in our courts and a very fine index. The subjects are well classified in chapter and sections. Leading cases are cited as authority on every significant issue. Statutes relating to comparison of handwriting are given for every state.

Dr. Baker has attempted to analyze a subject too little understood and too little appreciated by the legal profession. In this attempt he has admirably succeeded. *Law of Disputed and Forged Documents* is an indispensable first aid to every lawyer and judge in the trial of a forgery case. Every person interested in knowing more about methods of crime detection will also appreciate this learned treatise.

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