I hold his hands until they begin to stiffen. I shake him a little, sometimes hold his nose. This brings out the grasping reflex in the hands. I then slip a tiny stick into his hands. He grasps it tightly. I lift him and let him support himself over a feather pillow. Just the instant he begins to release his hold my assistant catches him. Nearly always he goes into a rage the moment this test starts. After three or four such tests the mere sight of my face drove the youngster into a rage. I no longer have to hamper his movement. A conditioned rage response has been built in.—John B. Watson, in the February McCall’s Magazine.

HOW “BANK SIGNATURES” DEVELOP

EVERY now and then you marvel at some chicken-track or worm-fence signature that turns up in the office on letter, check, or bill of lading. It goes from hand to hand, perfect in its illegibility; and men wonder how signatures “get that way.”

Well, what does lead to the indecipherable autograph, so common in business, so frequently attaching to banker, merchant, manufacturer, or railway magnate? The senior vice-president of a large bank gave his answer:

“The illegible signature may be due, of course, to actual inability to write plainly. Many a man of affairs, however, whose name stands for much on papers of various kinds, has worked out, at no little pains, a complex signature—one even abstruse and mystifying—with purpose to make forging it difficult.

“That, more likely than not, accounts for the scrawl which is supposed to represent a name. It need not indicate by any means the character of the general handwriting of its maker.”

“Nothing to it,” declared an assistant cashier, when the vice-president’s opinion was quoted to him. “Some men do hold that forgery idea, but it’s without foundation. On the contrary, the illegible signature is easier to forge than the plainly legible one. Any handwriting expert will tell you that, and any forger will confirm it.

“No doubt some men do devise unreadable signatures to beat the forger. But my own belief is that, in most instances, the illegible signature is simply the result of carelessness, not the product of design.

“Men whose occupation calls for much signing of papers, as checks, bonds, and the like—corporation officers, government officials—are prone to run or drool the signature into a mere scrawl, through making it hastily and perfunctorily when pressed for time.

“They let themselves form a bad habit, which becomes chronic. That’s why so many highly educated men can’t write their own names—so as to be read.”

“Your second man is right as to the futility of beating the forger by complicating one’s signature,” said a bank teller known as an “identification expert.” “Forgers find no unusual difficulties in duplicating the manufactured kind. I’ve often met with the belief, but am inclined to think it is held more largely by the older group of business men.

“There are various other causes of the wretched scrawls that pass for names. Perhaps most of the perpetrators grew into them quite naturally, without any set intent, simply because they never mastered legible signatures when in school and never tried later to overcome the handicap—if it be one.

“Then there is the occasional man who set about developing a signature that would be ‘different.’ In doing so, he fostered illegibility, something distinctive and eye-arresting, through vanity perhaps, or as an expression of individuality.”

Possibility for Improvement

Suppose it dawns on a man what a wretched job of writing his signature is?
Can he, at any age, by design and effort, permanently change his signature for the better?

"In the main, yes," replied the identification expert. "In the sense that writing a series of letters is only an exercise in drawing, any man can change his signature by conscientious practice. It's not easy, though—something like learning to write with the other hand.

"Some men unwittingly change their signature periodically, as by decades, so that a signature of twenty years ago may be very different from the one of today.

"Then there are men who hardly ever make the signature the same way twice. They are the bane of tellers, who often have to call up the signers for confirmation of checks—often to the vexation of the one called. A teller must be expert in remembering odd signatures, but the erratic and versatile signer is impossible to pin down.

Ways of Signing Names

"Strictly speaking, of course, no one ever writes the signature identically alike twice. That is, so that the two writings coincide in every detail when placed one upon the other. Such coincidence in superimposition is evidence of forgery by tracing."

There are fashions in signatures, too, it seems. "Among our 60,000 accounts," the teller continued, "we find that most men sign with initials only before the surname; not a few with the full first name—almost always if they use no middle one; a smaller number with first and middle names spelled out in full; and occasionally one who 'parts it in the middle.'

"In the first group, many run the capitals together—a practice contributing to original and striking autographs because of the variety of combinations possible.

"Women customers of the bank rarely sign with initials only before the surname. Banks having women's departments encourage this practice, for convenience in handling.

Women bank officers, however, as cashiers and vice-presidents, usually sign like men, with initials only before the last name. Incidentally, my observation is that women's signatures are usually more legible and more attractive than are men's."

Use of Secret Signatures

Are secret signatures really used in business?

The teller said they were. "Some signatures filed with the bank have certain secret marks in addition to the regular autographs, and we are instructed to pay checks only when bearing the special signatures.

"The mark may be a certain curve, twist, loop, slant, or shading—as a small 't' made with a loop at the top, or a dot put inside an 'o' or inside the top of an 'i' or a 'b' or an 'f,' or a dot omitted from an 'i' or a 'j.'

"The teller may have to consult his card to make sure. Sometimes the customer himself forgets to use the special signature and then gets incensed because the teller refused to honor his paper."

Forming Proper Habits

A teacher of writing in a business school said that signatures were good or bad as a matter of habit. "I am right now giving to a class of several hundred students, three days of intensive drill on developing signatures alone, to attain clearness, legibility, and individuality. I encourage experimenting with each signature to disclose its possibilities, and confer with each student to arrive at a choice of the best manner of writing it.

"Did it ever occur to you that 'F,' as a middle initial, is somewhat difficult to handle in a run-in combination? And that 'P' is even more so? The hand is moving to the left when completing the 'P.' 'T' presents a like difficulty. And other capitals in pairs vary much in 'combinableness.'

"After their school and courtship periods—and even there the typewriter is encroaching—few men find it necessary to do much
writing by hand. Many men in the higher positions in business do little writing except to sign their names."

Public schools are beginning to emphasize the signature as an entity, according to a supervisor of penmanship in a city system:

"The signature is the mark of the individual. It deserves special developing, and we give it particular attention. Looking at the autographs of parents, we feel that the rising generation should be taught to write its name well.

"Writing used to be taught as an art; now it is taught for utility. We have done away with the flourishes and scroll work, the unbirdlike birds, the decorative shadings. We study the individual pupil and correct what seems to be the fault in his practice."

Just a word on the other kind of signatures. Take out your bill case and examine its contents. Of the autographs of bank officers on national bank notes, perhaps the less said the better, but observe the clear, regular, firm, practiced, and assured calligraphy of the present officers of the United States Government now appearing on the paper currency—Frank White, treasurer of the United States; H. V. Speelman, register of the treasury, and A. W. Mellon, secretary of the treasury.

Has ability to write a plain, even elegant signature, become a requirement for such a post?—Thomas J. Malone, in Management.

SCHOOLROOM HUMOR

ABSENCE

Ray: "How do you play hookey from the correspondence school?"
Roy: "I send them an empty envelope."

THE AYES HAVE IT

Anxious Mother: "And is my boy really trying?"
Tired Teacher: "Very."

OVER THE FIRE

"And now," said the teacher, "will some one please give us a sentence using the word candor."

"Please'm," said the bright little boy in the front seat, "my papa had a pretty stenographer, but after ma saw her he candor."

PRETENSE

Teacher: "The sentence, 'My father had money,' is in the past tense. Now, Mary, what tense would you be speaking in if you said, 'My father has money?'"
Mary: "Pretense."

A REMINDER

A handsome and youthful college graduate was introduced at the morning assembly of the high school as the new teacher in music and art. He began his little speech by saying: "I see before me many bright and shining faces." And then 187 powder puffs went into action immediately, energetically, and effectively.

EXEGESIS

A teacher whose first year English class had been studying selections from the Old Testament offers this paper as an example of what a masterpiece can be produced by even her poorest student!

Story of Cane and Able

The city of Siam is where they lived and the people were doing mean and God told Cain and Abel that he was going to send a flood and told Abel and Cain to go out and build a ark and take two animals of each kind out with him and he did and he ask God if he could get fifty good people to go out with him—He said No—And Abel said forty God said No and kept on till he got to ten and God consented. And he did and went out and when he was going out God told them not to look back but his wife did and God turned her to a pillar of salt and Abel went on.