

“OF PROBABILITY”

(Extract from the book “Anonymous Letters” by Robert Saudek)

“We know from rather frequent occurrences in the courts that there are cases of disputed handwriting where people were unable to declare on oath that a signature was or was not their own.

To prove what a unique phenomenon our individual handwriting is, some authority has demonstrated that there are at least 177 ways of writing the figure 1, and that if one considers that there are 26 capital and 26 small letters and 10 figures, which makes 62 symbols altogether, and leaves out of account the complicated shape of many of these characters, accepting only the number of variations which occur in the figure 1 as the average of the variations which occur in all these 62 symbols, one comes to the conclusion that the possibility of variation in each handwriting is expressed in a figure of such astronomical dimensions that it exceeds the number of the population which could possibly every have lived on our planet.

And this statement has been taken as a means to show that it is impossible that two persons should ever write the same hand.

The reader will understand that this argument is misleading, and in fact proves something quite different: namely, the fact that absolute identities of all features were it only in a single word has been, not written twice, but actually traced.

The astronomical figure which has been stressed, with great though misplaced eloquence, rather illustrates the fact that nobody is capable of unalterably and consistently repeating precisely the same features of his own handwriting”