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## Editorial

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## EDITORIAL

### ALBERT S. OSBORN

After fifty-nine years of active practice as an examiner of questioned documents, Albert S. Osborn died in his eighty-eighth year, a few days before this number of the *Journal* went to press.

Experts were not in the best repute in 1887 when Mr. Osborn began his professional career — not in the courts. To be sure, even in that year, there were men of wide reputation in Mr. Osborn's specialty. But they had not built an honorable profession or a worthy distinction for themselves. The public and the courts looked askance, as a matter of course, at experts as witnesses. And how hard it is to wipe out matter-of-courseness!

Yet in little more than two decades — twenty-three years, to be exact — Mr. Osborn had equipped himself so thoroughly that, out of a vast experience, he was able to write the first edition of his *Questioned Documents* (1910). By that time, he had made great strides in the scientific determination of the genuineness of documents and in the techniques of proving their authenticity. There was an attitude of hospitality on the part of the courts and the legal profession toward the expert on documents. The demand for Mr. Osborn's writings and the development of photography and chemistry and of the techniques of applying them in the detection of forgeries and the like justified the second edition of *Questioned Documents* in 1929. In the meantime, 1927, his *Problems of Proof* had been published and later, in 1944, *Questioned Document Problems*. The last is meant to offer useful suggestions to the young practitioner in the law: what to do and how when he comes upon a case of questionable authenticity of a document.

Mr. Osborn appeared as an expert witness in almost countless cases in every part of the country. His practice was punctuated by participation in numerous spectacular cases — the question of Hauptmann's handwriting, for example — but Mr. Osborn, himself, never courted the public eye. He was a quiet, unassuming, genial man with a great capacity for winning friends. He was methodical and painstaking to the last degree in small things and large.

It is the lot of few men to see their profession grow to greatness from a mere beginning. Mr. Osborn lived in a great period of scientific discovery. The credit goes to him for sensing what could be useful to his art, for bringing it together and for developing techniques to serve the purposes of his profession.

ROBERT H. GAULT