

COLONIAL HANDWRITING.

BY CHARLES KNOWLES BOLTON.

To copy a manuscript letter for letter, is, in the minds of some, the mark of pedantry; to modernize it is, in the estimation of others, the source of all inaccuracy.

Whether we copy letter for letter or give the words as they should be we should at least know just what was intended by each character in the manuscript before copying. Thus this word:

should be recognized as "desesed" before it becomes "deceased."

Some of the early handwriting shows a lack of training which is to be expected in an agricultural community like that in the New England of the seventeenth century. The callous hand was not always under control. A quaintness, too, was given to the page by the spelling which at best allowed some liberty to follow one's taste, originality, and manner of pronunciation. A man who spelled "son" with a double "o" would now be writing his own death warrant.

But there were certain forms characteristic of the writing of our emigrant ancestors which were due neither to paper, pen nor lack of training. These are after all few, but they appear with sufficient frequency to puzzle one unfamiliar with the subject. They may be traced in part to the teaching of the schoolmaster and in part to the influence of the printed forms of letters.

"A" and "B" have changed little since the days of Pericles.

Capital "C," in many cases looks like a copy-book "O," in which the returning stroke, instead of meeting the point of starting runs down inside the downward stroke. The whole is crossed by a horizontal line. Sometimes it is an "O" open at the top and crowned with a cup or semicircle. The small "c" is usually much like the small printed "r"—a downward heavy stroke with a horizontal line at the top.

The small "d" usually has a loop above instead of a downward final stroke.

Capital "E" is commendably individual. In officially prepared documents it is the common capital "C" with a small "z" just inside the downward stroke, or, as in the signature of Jacob Eliot, brother of the apostle, the "z" crossed back and forth over the downward stroke of the "C." It is so written by Madit Engs of Boston, whose peculiar name is among those of the early settlers.

The small "e" is an imperfect "c" surmounted by a dash or cup. In ordinary writing it became an "o" with the last stroke looped at the top. This form is frequently misleading. Often, however, the loop comes above the starting point of the letter, which then looks like one form of the Greek "th."

The double "ff" was used occasionally, as in the surnames ffrench and ffarrington, but hardly more often in the seventeenth century than as an affectation in the nineteenth.

Capital "G" is usually very intelligible. A curious form, however, is that of a backward inclining capital "C" with the last stroke running down into a loop across the center of the "C," and returning to form a smaller loop some distance above the character. The small "g" is often a "y" crossed at the top or mouth.

Capital "H" is often simple. One form appears as a written "S" (looped at the top) with an inverted cap below and a tail starting at its right and running downward. The small "h" is a very curious transformation of a simple letter. The main part of the letter decreases to little or nothing, while the final downward

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H Kauffman



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