*Shorte, Swifte and Secrete Writing by Character* (1588), which set forth a system of writing by character or shorthand, was dedicated to Queen Elizabeth, who rewarded the author with a Yorkshire living, and granted to him the sole right for fifteen years of teaching and printing books “ in or by Character not before this tyme commonlye knowne and used by anye other oure subjects ” (Patent Roll, 30, Eliz. part 12). Peter Bales (1547?-1610) promised his pupils that “ you may also learn to write as fast as a man speaketh, by the arte of Brachigraphie by him devised, writing but one letter for a word ”; his “ Arte of Brachigraphie ” is contained in his *Writing* *Schoolemaster* (1590). Only with a gigantic memory and by unremitting labour could one acquire a practical knowledge of such methods.

The first shorthand system worthy of the name which, so far as is known, appeared in England is that of John Willis (d. *c.* 1627), whose *Art of Stenographie* (London, 14 editions @@1 from 1602 to 1647) is substantially based on the common alphabet; but the clumsiness of his alphabetic signs, and the confused laborious contrivances by which he denotes prefixes and terminations, involving the continual lifting of the pen, would seem to render his method almost as slow as longhand. Of the numerous systems which intervened between J. Willis’s and Isaac Pitman’s phonography (1837) nearly all were based, like Willis’s, on the alphabet, and may be called, a, b, c systems. But seven were, like phonography, strictly phonetic, viz. those by Tiffin (1750), Lyle (1762), Holds- worth and Aldridge (1766), Roe (1802), Phineas Bailey (1819), Towndrow (1831) and De Stains (1839).

A few general remarks apply largely to all the a, b, c systems. Each letter is designated by a straight line or curve (vertical, horizontal, or sloping), sometimes with the addition of a hook or loop. *C* and *q* are rejected, *k* being substituted for hard *c* and *q, s* for soft *c.* Signs are provided for *ch, sh, th. G* and *j* are classed under one sign, because in some words *g* is pronounced as *j,* as in *giant, gem.* Similarly each of the pairs *f*, *v* and *s, z* has only one sign. A few authors make the signs for *j, v, z* heavier than those for *g,f, s.* Some class *p* and *b, t* and *d,* each under one sign. The steno­graphic alphabet is therefore—*a, b, d, e, f* (*v*), *g (j), h, i, k, l, m, n, o, p, r, s, (z), t, u, w, x, y, ch, sh, th.* Letters which are not sounded may be omitted. *Gh, ph* may be counted as *f* in such words as *cough, Philip',* but the *th* in *thing* is never distinguished from the *th* in *them.* Thus the a, b, c systems are largely phonetic with respect to consonant-sounds; it is rather with regard to the vowels that they disregard the phonetic principle. No attempt is made to provide adequately for the many vowel-sounds of the language. Thus the signs for *like* and *lick,* for *rate* and *rat,* &c., are the same. In the case of vowel-sounds denoted by two letters, that vowel is to be written which best represents the sound. Thus in *meat* the *e* is selected, but in *great* the *a.* In some a, b, c systems, including the best of them (Taylor’s), a dot placed anywhere does duty for all the vowels. This practice is, of course, a fruitful source of error, for *pauper,* and *paper, gas* and *goose,* and hundreds of other pairs of words would according to this plan be written alike. In the early systems of Willis and his imitators the vowels are mostly written either by joined characters or by lifting the pen and writing the next consonant in a certain position with respect to the preceding one. Both these plans are bad; for lifting the pen involves expenditure of time, and vowels expressed by joined signs and not by marks external to the word cannot be omitted, as is often necessary in swift writing, without changing the general appearance of the word and forcing the eye and the hand to accustom themselves to two sets of outlines, vocalized and unvocalized. In the better a,b,c systems the alphabetic signs, besides combining to denote words, may also stand alone to designate certain short common

words, prefixes and suffixes. Thus in Harding’s edition of Taylor’s system the sign for *d,* when written alone, denotes *do, did,* the prefixes *de-, des-,* and the terminations *-dom, -end, -ened, -ed.* This is a good practice if the words are well chosen and precautions taken to avoid ambiguities. Numbers of symbolical signs and rough word-pictures, and even wholly arbitrary marks, are employed to denote words and entire phrases. Symbolical or pictorial signs, if sufficiently suggestive and not very numerous, may be effective; but the use of “arbitraires ” is objectionable because they are so difficult to remember. In many shorthand books the student is recommended to form additional ones for himself, and so of course make his writing illegible to others. The *raison d'être* of such signs is not far to seek. The proper shorthand signs for many common words were so clumsy or ambiguous that this method was resorted to in order to provide them with clearer and easier outlines. For the purpose of verbatim reporting the student is recommended to omit as a rule all vowels, and decipher his writing with the aid of the context. But, when vowels are omitted, hundreds of pairs of words having the same consonant skeleton (such as *minister* and *monastery, frontier* and *furniture, libel* and *label)* are written exactly alike. This is one of the gravest defects of the a, b, c systems.

John Willis’s system was largely imitated but hardly improved by Edmond Willis (1618), T. Shelton (1620), Witt (1630), Dix (1633), Mawd (1635), and Theophilus Metcalfe (1635). T. Shelton’s system, republished a great many times down to 1687, was the one which Samuel Pepys used in writing his diary.@@2 It was adapted to German, Dutch and Latin.@@3 An advertisement of Shelton’s work in the *Mercurius Pοliticus* of 3rd October 1650 is one of the earliest business advertisements known. The book of Psalms in metre (206 pages, 2⅜ × 1½ in.) was engraved according to Shelton’s system by Thomas Cross. Metcalfe’s *Radio-Stenography,* or *Short-Writing,* was republished again and again for about a hundred years. The 35th “edition” is dated 1693, and a 55th is known to exist. The inefficiency of the early systems seems to have brought the art into some contempt. Thus Thomas Heywood, a contemporary of Shake- speare, says in a prologue @@4 that his play of *Queen Elizabeth*

“ Did throng the seats, the boxes and the stage So much that some by stenography drew A plot, put it in print, scarce one word true.”

Shakespeare critics would in this manner explain the badness of the text in the earliest editions of *Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, Taming of the Shrew, Merry Wives of Windsor,* and *Henry V.* Perhaps a study of J. Willis’s system and of E. Willis’s (which, though not published till after Shakespeare’s death, was practised long before) may shed light on corrupt readings of the text of these plays.@@5 Rich’s system (1646, 20th edition 1792) was reproduced with slight alterations by many other persons, including W. Addy, Stringer, and Dr Philip Doddridge (1799 and three times since). The New Testament and Psalms were engraved in Rich’s characters (1659, 596 pages, 2⅛×1⅜ in., 2 vols.), and Addy brought out the whole Bible engraved in shorthand@@6 (London, 1687, 396 pp.). Locke, in his *Treatise on Education,* recommends Rich’s system; but it is encumbered with more than 300 symbolical and arbitrary signs. In 1847 it was still used by Mr Plowman, a most accomplished Oxford reporter.

In 1672 William Mason, the best shorthand author of the 17th century, published his *Pen pluck'd from an Eagle's Wing.* The alphabet was largely taken from Rich’s. But in his *Art's Advancement* (1682) only six of Rich’s letters are retained, and in bis *Plume Volanle* (1707) further

@@@1The first edition, published anonymously, is entitled *The Art of Stenographie, teaching by plaine and certaine rules, to the capacitie of the meanest, and for the use of all professions, the way to Compendious writing. Whereunto is annexed a very easie Direction for Stegano­graphie, or Secret Writing,* printed at London in 1602 for Cuthbert Burbie. The only known copies are in the Bodleian and British Museum libraries.

@@@2 See a paper by J. E. Bailey, “ On the Cipher of Pepys’ Diary,” in *Papers of the Manchester Literary Club,* vol. ii. (1876). Shelton (1601-1650) is not to be confounded with the translator of *Don Quixote.*

@@@3 See Zeibig’s *Gesch. u. Lit. d. Geschwindschreibekunst,* p. 195.

*@@@4 Pleasant Dialogues and Drammas* (London, 1637), p. 249.

@@@5 See M. Levy’s *Shakspere and Shorthand* (London), and *Phonetic Journal* (1885), p. 34.

@@@6 This curiosity is described in the *Phonetic Journal* (1885), pp. 158, 196. The Bodleian Library has a copy.