

IDENTIFYING CRIMINALS.



THE UNWILLING SUBJECT OF PHOTOGRAPHY.

LARCENY WITHOUT
VIOLENCE.

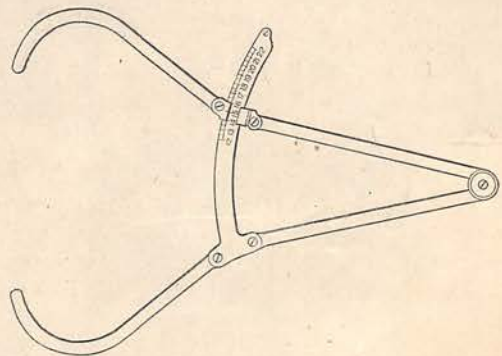
(A composite photograph.)

A NOTABLE reform is about to be made in British methods of identifying criminals. Hitherto the practice of our police, though the details differ widely in different forces, has been always dependent upon personal recognition by police or prison officers. This is the method by which identity is proved in criminal courts, and whilst its scope is extended by photography, and in some

cases aided by such devices as registers of distinctive marks, it also remains generally the basis of the methods by which identity is discovered.

Obviously, such procedure is exposed to various drawbacks. The number of criminals seen by each officer, especially in London, is so great that it is impossible, after long intervals, for any but men endowed with a singularly good memory to remember more than

a few of them. A register of habitual criminals is kept at the Home Office, and issued annually to every police force. It contains a list of between three and four thousand names in alphabetical order, with



CALLIPERS FOR MEASURING LENGTH AND BREADTH OF HEAD.

record of the date of conviction, character of crime, and some other particulars.

This work of reference is not, however, very largely used, partly because it does not come out oftener than once a year, and partly owing to the fact that as there is no general index extending beyond that period, a series of volumes may have to be searched for any case dating back beyond twelve months. Moreover, old offenders do not hesitate to assume false names. Another volume, also issued yearly, contains photographs of criminals, with a description of their distinctive marks, classified according to the nature of these marks and their position on the body. But this



A TYPICAL CRIMINAL FACE.

also is inadequate, and sometimes misleading. The unwilling subject of photography often contrives to change his expression when in front of the camera, and when liberated, he can alter his personal appearance by either growing moustache, whiskers, and beard, or shaving them off.

Many prisoners have no bodily marks that are really distinctive, or only such as are not uncommon. Even when such marks are extremely uncommon in character, there is a risk that they may be found repeated in two cases, also presenting other points of similarity. Such was the experience

of a dishonest woman, whose sentence was reduced from seven years to six months, when it was found that, being identified by personal appearance, apparent age, and the fact of having lost her left breast, she had been erroneously credited with the previous convictions of a still more hardened female offender of similar age and appearance, who, strangely enough, had also lost her left breast.

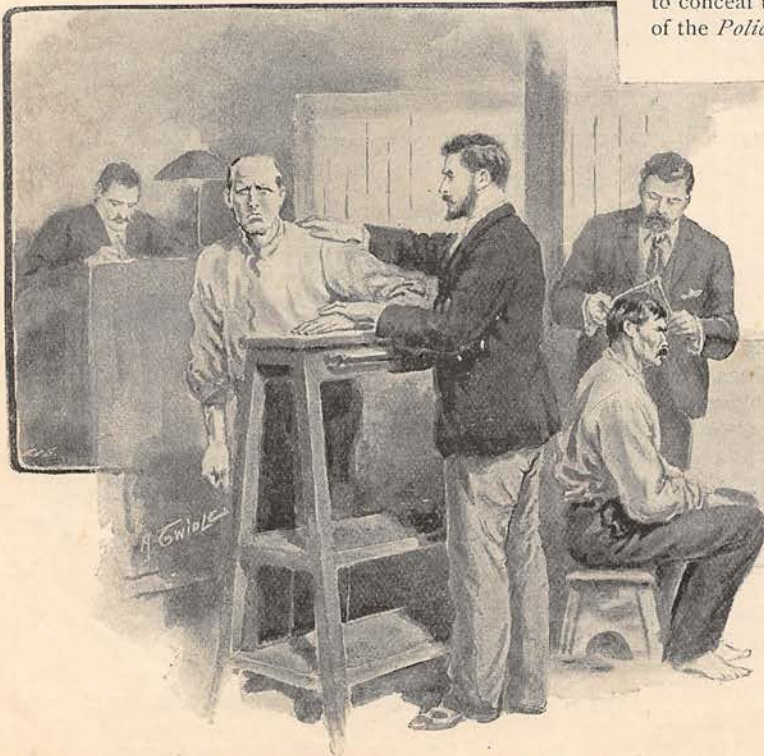


THE MOUTH OF A CRIMINAL DROPS TOWARDS THE RIGHT, AS A RULE.

upon their bodies. In the Convict Supervision Office there is a register of tattoo marks, such as initials, anchor, cross, ship, flag, heart, or star.

Sometimes, in order to prevent recognition, these marks are defaced. In one case the single letter "d" was, by further tattooing, converted into the last letter of the word "mermaid." In other cases the marks are scorched so as to obliterate them. At Birmingham the police keep a register which shows by coloured drawings the tattoo marks with which so many criminals ornament their bodies. At Liverpool special registers are kept of the maiden names of the wives and mothers of criminals, these names being often adopted by convicts who deem it expedient to conceal their own proper names. The issue of the *Police Gazette* (once known as the *Hue and Cry*) twice a week keeps the police posted up as to criminals "wanted," or with regard to whom, being already under arrest, further information is required. Another expedient adopted with the same view is the issue of what are known as "route forms," in which inquiries concerning the previous career of a prisoner are rapidly made of police or prison officials in a number of districts where it is supposed he or she is most likely to be known.

This is found most useful in the case of thieves who confine their plundering to a limited locality, or who, as is not unusual, are partial to particular kinds of crime. Some, for instance, devote their misapplied talents almost exclusively to coining, others to stealing bicycles, others to



THE BERTILLON SYSTEM AT WORK IN PARIS.

larceny from lodgings, and so on. Greater difficulty is found in tracing the antecedents of travelling thieves, or criminals who do not restrict their operations to one class of offence. With regard to these and others, it is possible under the present system for a prisoner to suffer undeservedly through a mistake of identification. It is, however, much more common for old offenders to succeed in concealing their identity when arrested for a fresh breach of the law. Moreover, the present process of identification is more slow and cumbersome than is necessary.

These reasons led the Home Secretary to appoint a departmental committee, presided over by Mr. Charles E. Troup, who have now, after careful investigation of the whole subject, reported in favour of a twofold reform. What they recommend is that criminals in this country should henceforth be classified by measurement, and that this should be supplemented with identification by means of finger-prints.

Visitors during recent years to the meetings of the British Association are aware that in one of the ante-rooms, known as the anthropometric laboratory, a staff and appliances are provided for taking measurements and other personal records of such members and associates as choose to submit themselves to the needful examination.

Among the particulars thus gathered and recorded are the subject's nationality, age, occupation, weight, stature, colour of hair and eyes, length of nose, breadth of head, pulling strength, sense of colour, etc.

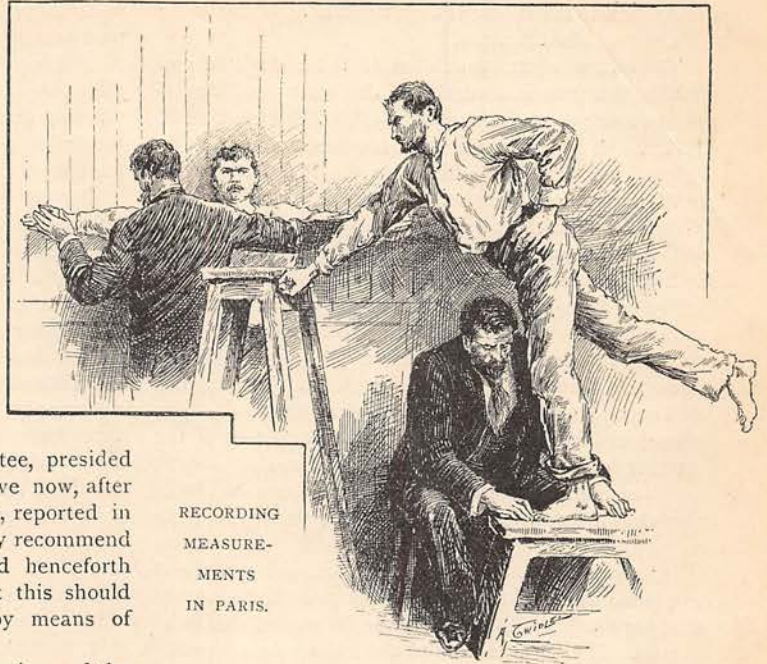
When sufficient data are collected from different parts of the country, these facts will afford some interesting and possibly valuable generalisations as to the physical features and powers of various classes of persons in different portions of the kingdom. With some necessary variation in details, the same method—known as the Bertillon system—is extensively used

in Paris for the classification and identification of criminals. The record taken of each prisoner consists of certain measurements which depend mainly on the length of the bony structures in the

body, and may therefore be treated for practical purposes as invariable in adults.

The cards on which these particulars are recorded are so classified that each can be easily found by means of the measurements alone, without the name of the person. Thus, by taking the measurements of any person who is arrested, it is possible to ascertain his identity if he is already among the records under any name whatever.

The five most important measurements



RECORDING MEASUREMENTS IN PARIS.

which form the basis of the system are the length and width of head, length of the left middle finger, the left foot, and the left fore-arm—these being selected as the most constant in each individual, the most varied in different persons, the least co-related to one another, and the easiest to take accurately.

A separate classification is made for lads whose bones are still subject to growth. It is not needful

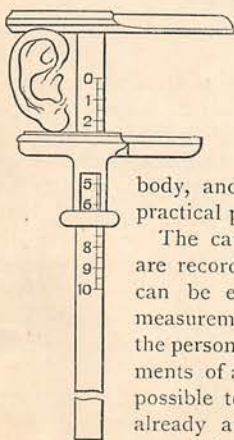


MR. GALTON'S THREE TYPES OF FINGER-PRINTS.

here to describe the manifold sub-divisions of the cabinets in which the cards are classified. Let it suffice to note that under this system a mis-identification is practically impossible, considering the enormous safeguards in the numerous measurements, each of which must correspond within narrow limits in order that an identification may be established. Any warder identifying a criminal who has escaped recognition by this ordeal receives a reward of ten francs, payable out of the sum voted to the Bertillon staff.

About thirty thousand cases are dealt with annually in Paris alone, yet last year there was not a single failure, and in previous years only three or four.

The system is regarded as affording a complete



EAR MEASUREMENT.

protection to an innocent man against any possibility of a wrong identification.

The second recommendation of the committee embodies the practical results of the system of finger-prints, associated with the name of Mr. Francis Galton, F.R.S. This consists of impressions taken in printer's ink from the bulbs immediately below the tips of the fingers and thumbs.

At that point the papillary ridges form patterns of well-marked forms, and of a curious variety. In each individual these patterns retain their peculiarities absolutely unchangeable throughout life, and in different individuals they show an infinite variety of form. Impressions taken from the same person at different ages are found exactly to correspond. The chance of two finger-prints being identical is less than one in sixty-four thousand millions. This means that if the number of the human race is reckoned at sixteen hundred millions, there is a smaller chance than one to four that the print of one finger of any person shall be exactly like that of any finger of any other person.

If, therefore, two finger-prints are compared and are found to coincide exactly, it is practically certain that they are prints of the same fingers of the same person. If they at all differ, the inference is equally obvious that they are made by different fingers. The prints of one finger, if clearly taken, are therefore enough to decide the question of identity or non-identity, and if the prints of three or more fingers be taken and compared, all possibility of error is absolutely eliminated.

The committee state their opinion that for the purpose of proving identity the finger-prints examined and compared by an expert furnish a method far more certain than any other. They are incomparably more certain than personal recognition or identification by photograph.

Under the Bertillon system it is conceivable, though

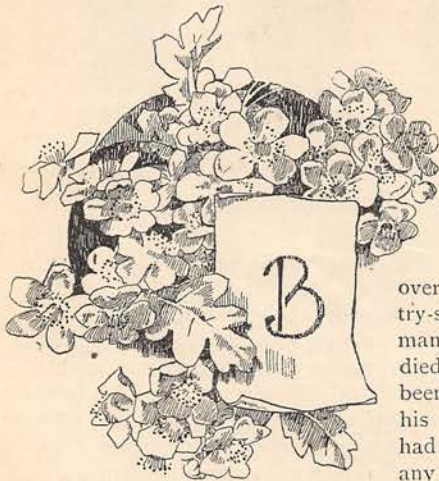
most improbable, that two persons might have measurements coinciding within the limits which have to be allowed for error, and that they might also have the same distinctive marks; but it is wholly inconceivable that two persons should show an exact coincidence in the prints of two or three, not to speak of ten fingers.

Despite the absolute certainty of finger-prints as a criterion of identity, it may be some time before they are accepted as legal proof in courts of law; meantime, they will be used as a practically unerring aid in identifying criminals when arrested, and tracing their past career.

One drawback to the extensive use of this system is the difficulty of classification—the differences being necessarily minute. Finger-prints are divided into three forms or types: *viz.*, arches, loops, and whorls, to one of which every finger-print may be assigned. In all digits the ridges immediately adjoining the third joint run across the finger, while those towards the tip follow the form of the nail in a rounded arch, but in the space left at the centre of the bulb the ridges have various curvatures, forming the pattern of the finger-print.

It is difficult upon any large scale to classify the minutiae of these cores. Nevertheless, even when there is deterioration in the clearness of the ridges through old age or rough manual work, the pattern can be distinguished, and injury, although it may distort the pattern, rarely produces such alteration in the ridges as to cause confusion. Mr. Galton relates that an assistant got his fingers badly burned, but when the burn healed the original imprint marks re-appeared without the slightest alteration.

When the new system of criminal identification has been to some extent established in England, it will be extended to Scotland and Ireland, gradually superseding the methods hitherto in use.



THE "THING" AT BOGGART'S END.

BOGGART'S END had an evil name over all the country-side. The old man who had just died there had been miserly in his habits, and had ceased to have any friendly inter-

course with his neighbours years before; it was not within the memory of the village when he had been other than dirty and lonely. There was much curious speculation about his heir, who was reported to be a distant kinsman of old Joe's, but the lawyer who came

over from Bridgeford to arrange matters was not communicative, and nothing was definitely known until the new owner was actually installed at Boggart's End.

It seemed at first as if John Broom must have inherited old Joe's unneighbourly ways as well as his hoarded wealth, for Brickwell saw nothing of him. The cottage was almost two miles away from the village. One or two of the more curious had strolled up past the house on Sunday afternoons or in the evenings, but the upper windows were closely curtained, and the garden hedge of clipped yew made an impenetrable screen to the lower part.

There were dark hints dropped at the "Foresters' Arms," where the subject was fully discussed every evening. Mrs. Barnes, the landlady, was prepared for the worst.