



## THE IDENTIFICATION OF CRIMINALS IN FRANCE.

By EDMUND R. SPEARMAN.

With Illustrations from Official Photographs.



HAVING had the good fortune to see the inner workings of the thieftakers' profession in Paris, as exercised to-day, it may interest the readers of this magazine if I give a graphic example of one of the most recent improvements in the methods of the French detectives, and one which has made their mastership over the criminal classes almost omnipotent. The most easy way in which to understand the method alluded to is to study a case as unfolded by the record of the Paris officials.

Although, for obvious reasons, we will make a few slight changes in names and other data, we will follow the case of a renowned London pickpocket. In August, 1883, at the well-known drapery establishment, the Magasin du Louvre, in the Rue de Rivoli, a gentlemanly-looking visitor, of whom the accompanying front and side view is a representation, was, with considerable difficulty, arrested upon a charge of picking the pocket of an English lady. The accused, calling himself an American was very indignant at the charge, and made an appeal to the United States Minister for interference. The prisoner, who gave the name of John Hickson admitted afterwards that he was an English subject, although he had lived many years in New York, but nothing being found upon him, and no trace of a confederate being discovered, he was ultimately released. Naturally the French police felt nettled at losing their capture, but knowing the unfaltering and fatal certainty of their own methods, and, being morally assured of the guilt of Mr. John Hickson, of London and New York, felt sure that he would once more fall into their clutches, and vindicate their accuracy. In 1883 the Paris police had just inaugurated a new method of identification, and before Mr. John Hick-



MR. JOHN HICKSON OF NEW YORK. FROM AN OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPH.

son was restored to "England, home, and beauty" his personal description was thus recorded :—

Height <sup>1</sup> ... ..	M. CM. MM.	Head {	Length ... ..	CM. MM.	Left foot ... ..	CM. MM.	COLOUR OF EYES. Class 2 <sup>4</sup> . Aureola, Light Hazel. Periphery, Yellowish Green.		
Stoop ... ..	0 1 0		Width ... ..	15 6		24 4			
Stretch of Arms ...	1 61 0		Right {	Length ... ..		6 4		,, Middle Finger ...	11 2
Bust ... ..	0 85 5		Ear {	Width ... ..		3 5		,, Little Finger ...	8 8
					,, Forearm ... ..	44 8			

Anchor 3 × 2 centimetres tattooed 3 centimetres above right wrist anterior.  
 Mole 5 centimetres below left shoulder external.  
 Rectilinear scar 1 centimetre oblique inwards, second phalange right middle finger posterior.  
 Mole 5 centimetres above right nipple, 8 centimetres from median line.

The next year the Bertillon system had become so generally established, that the Director of Prisons, M. Herbette, had given orders that all prison inmates should be measured and their descriptions forwarded to the Central Bureau in Paris.

Among the many thousands so sent, was that of John Brown, of London, caught red-handed in pocket-picking at Nice during the Carnival and sent to prison for three months as a first offender. Here you have the portrait of him in his convict suit, and most readers will doubtless declare that he is no old acquaintance of theirs, certainly no possible connection with the Anglo-American whose arrest gave such a shock to the sense of propriety in 1883.



JOHN BROWN, alias JOHN HICKSON. FROM AN OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPH.

However M. Bertillon, the head of the French Identification Bureau has demonstrated that photography alone is a poor reed for the police to rely on in matters of personal recognition. In accordance with his system of anthropometric descriptions the full account of the Nice pickpocket was attached to the photograph, and from that record I now copy :—

Howeever M. Bertillon, the head of the French Identification Bureau has demonstrated that photography alone is a poor reed for the police to rely on in matters of personal recognition. In accordance with his system of anthropometric descriptions the full account of the Nice pickpocket was attached to the photograph, and from that record I now copy :—

Height ... ..	M. CM. MM.	Head {	Length ... ..	CM. MM.	Left Foot ... ..	CM. MM.		
Stoop ... ..	0 1 0		Width ... ..	15 6		24 5		
Stretch of Arms ...	1 60 0		Right {	Length ... ..		6 4	,, Middle Finger ...	11 3
Bust ... ..	0 85 7		Ear {	Width ... ..		3 5	,, Little Finger ...	8 8
					,, Forearm ... ..	44 7		

When this description was placed in its proper pigeon-hole at Paris, and a precisely similar description was found there with the name of John Hickson on it, the official doubtless gave a triumphant whistle to himself and exclaimed, "Hullo, my fine Anglo-American martyr! Here you are at last!" Sure enough, the pet of the newspapers and the subject of international excitement had fallen to vulgar incarceration for an offence committed at the very home of European fashion, where his guilt was no subject of doubt. As Mr. John Hickson of New York he had figured as "commission agent," while as John Brown of London he announced himself as a "merchant." He was always above all things a "gentleman." However, he had served his time, left his prison, and knew not of what a certain official in Paris had evolved in his secret thoughts.

Another year passed, and in February, 1885, the police of Paris were again confronted with a much injured and most indignant gentleman from New York—a scholarly person in blue spectacles being taken by two plain clothes men at the

<sup>1</sup> The measurements are in metres, centimetres, and millimetres, or 39·37079 inches (a metre), and hundredths and thousandths of that measure. The tenth (decimetre) is never used.

Pygmalion in the Rue de Rivoli, accused of attempting to pick the pocket of an innocent French provincial. Really this American citizen did seem most badly treated. To begin with, the innocent provincial had lost nothing, and knew of no attempt upon his goods and chattels. It was only the sharp eyes of the officers which could testify to anything wrong. Then the accused was such a respectable person—a tutor in Paris for a holiday. When taken to the *depôt* it was proposed to take his measurements, but he mildly but firmly remonstrated at such an indignity. He was altogether a mild sort of person, not at all like the hot-tempered commission agent whose fist had felled his accuser so readily. The officials put the case to him that, as a scholar and a man of reason, he must appreciate the fact that a refusal to be thus measured was in itself ground for grave suspicion. Mr. Henry White—for so the tutor called himself—had evidently some



MR. HENRY WHITE, *alias* JOHN BROWN, *alias* JOHN HICKSON. FROM AN OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPH.

deep-seated distrust of the measurement business, for he still declined to allow himself to be measured. He was put back for the night, and in his hours of innocent slumber his hat, gloves, and boots were appropriated by the officers and carefully measured, and a sufficiently close record obtained to give them, without very great trouble, a perfect clue to the personage they had in their hands. In the morning, with the information in his hand, the chief of the Identification Bureau, had another interview with

Mr. White, and something like the following dialogue occurred:—

OFFICIAL.—One of my officers thinks that a year or two ago he saw you here and measured you?

MR. WHITE.—That is impossible. I have never been in Paris before.

OFFICIAL.—Why are you not at Nice this year?

MR. W. (starting).—Why should you ask me such a question?

OFFICIAL.—Well, it was stupid, it is true; your visit last year was not very pleasant.

MR. W.—I have never been at Nice in my life. This is my first visit to France, and it will be my last.

OFFICIAL.—Indeed, you are very like a friend of ours who was in Paris in 1883 and at Nice last year.

MR. W.—Well, it was not I, that is all I know.

OFFICIAL.—You have never been measured here or at Nice?

MR. W.—Never. How could I, since this is my first visit to France?

OFFICIAL.—Well our friend has an anchor exactly three centimetres above his right wrist in front  $3 \times 2$  centimetres.

MR. W.—Oh, nearly every American has an anchor on his arm. Here is mine.

OFFICIAL.—Ah! curiously enough yours is exactly of the same size, and in the same position. Our friend happens to have a mole just there (placing his finger exactly five centimetres above the right nipple, eight from the median line): would it not be strange if you happen to have just such a mole? Please to let us look. Ah! there it is! and the official continued thus with the other marks.

“Mr. Henry White of New York” winced under this omniscient scrutiny, and confessed the identity he had so stoutly denied. He was sentenced to the maximum penalty, and ordered never again to set foot in France.

In February, 1887, a young Corsican, giving his name as Victor Tomasini, and

his occupation as a humble scullion, was taken into custody for a daring burglary and murderous assault in the Boulevard Voltaire, an old concierge being so wounded by a stab as to imperil his life. Tomasini was eventually convicted and sentenced to New Caledonia, but while being transferred on the railway, escaped from the train. He must necessarily have received most terrible injuries, and the police were in doubt whether he could still be in the land of the living. However, before his escape, he left behind him the following data :—

	M.	CM.	MM.		CM.	MM.		CM.	MM.	
Height	1	61	4	Head {	Length...	18	5	Left Foot...	26	3
Stoop					Width ...	14	6		,, Middle Finger...	11
Stretch of Arms	1	63	0	Right {	Length	5	5	,, Little Finger ...	8	9
Bust	0	88	5		Ear {	Width...	3	7	,, Forearm ...	44

The colour of the eyes and biographical description were also attached to the record.

Nearly two years elapsed, and early in December, 1888, when the crowd were struggling to enter the popular Vaudeville Theatre in Paris, a young man, Pierre Martin, of Lyons, a cook, was taken into custody for pocket-picking. Here is his portrait as taken, not without some reluctance on the part of the subject, who affected an air of stupidity, mixed with timid apprehension as to what was intended. The portrait, at a cursory glance, gave no indication to the



VICTOR TOMASINI. FROM AN OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPH.

police of anything particularly interesting in the personality of the prisoner; when however his measurements were recorded by the anthropometrical system a sudden gleam of light dawned upon the mind of the officials :—

	M.	CM.	MM.		CM.	MM.		CM.	MM.	
Height	1	62	5	Head {	Length...	18	5	Left Foot	26	3
Stoop...					Width ...	14	7		,, Middle Finger	11
Stretch of Arms	1	65	0	Right {	Length	5	5	,, Little Finger	8	8
Bust	0	88	0		Ear {	Width...	3	7	,, Forearm	44

All other particulars agreed with the personality of the escaped Corsican, and Pierre Martin was ultimately obliged to confess his identity, and was sent to serve the sentence he had previously eluded.

The anthropometrical system, which is carried out under the supervision of M. Alphonse Bertillon, the inventor, consists in accurately recording the measurements of certain parts of the human frame which do not alter after adult age has been reached, and the exact size and position of marks and scars. The French authorities with an experience in the measurement of nearly 150,000 subjects, have not yet found two cases in which all the measurements were alike, and exact duplicates of two or more marks have never been found on different individuals. If then you get an individual whose measurements and marks are identical with a record, you may be sure that the record refers to him. The French officials trust entirely to the figures, and never even look at a photograph until they have satisfied themselves of the absolute similarity of the anthropometrical description lest they should reject the right card through being misled by a deceitful resemblance. One, however, of the greatest advantages of the Bertillon system is the power it gives of *classifying* photographs. We will suppose that we have a collection of 60,000 photographs to classify. They will first be divided into three classes—the large, the medium, and the small, according to the length of the head—each containing 20,000 photographs. Each of these primary

divisions will again be divided into three classes—large, medium, and small—according to the width of the head, and these nine subdivisions would contain about 6,000 each. To be again subdivided into three groups of 2,000 each according to the



PIERRE MARTIN, *alias* VICTOR TOMASINI. FROM AN OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPH.

length of the middle finger. The length of the foot will divide them into classes of 600 each. But now a division by the length of the forearm will give a quotient of 200 reduced by length of outstretched arms to sixty-three, further reduced by colour of eyes (seven categories) to nine in each final division, which can be rapidly but carefully examined. There has not been a single case of mistaken identity since the system was established. In 1888, in Paris alone, out of 31,845 prisoners measured 615

were recognized as having been previously measured under different names. Fourteen were not identified until after conviction, but of these ten had never been previously measured, so that the failures in identification were four in nearly 32,000, say one in 8,000.

