THE PARISIAN POLICE.

By A. SHADWELL.

With Portraits by W. D. ALMOND.

NO body of men is subjected to so much unreasoning abuse as the police; and this is even truer in France than in England. It seems impossible for them to please the public. We all fly to them for assistance, and then show our gratitude by flinging stones at them, in jest or in earnest, upon every possible occasion. When we want them they are our best friends, to whom we turn with the utmost confidence, when we do not, we join in treating them as a common enemy. This inconsistent behaviour is not very easy to understand: but so far as the press is concerned—and the press is chiefly to blame—the principal motive is undoubtedly political, especially in France, where the government for the time being has so many bitter enemies. Abuse of the police is a handy stick with which to beat the Ministry in general or the particular Minister who is responsible for their conduct: and to the political motive must be added the love of getting up a popular cry or sensation, which is the breath of life to journalism. The attitude of the public is due partly to the lead given by the press and partly to the general habit of grumbling. In the case of both, criticism of the police depends largely upon ignorance; not only ignorance of the facts upon a given occasion, but, still more, ignorance of the set conditions under which the police work. Those conditions are regulated by law, which enjoins certain actions and forbids others; and when people find fault with the police for sins of commission or omission, what they ought really to blame in nine cases out of ten is the law. One day the press will loudly demand, amid public applause, some utterly illegal proceeding from the police, the next it will severely condemn them for doing that which is their bounden duty. The former happens more frequently in England, the latter in France, for this reason: that the French law gives much greater power of action with regard to the arrest of suspects and treats them with much greater severity when arrested.

For instance, burglaries are committed in Chelsea and every one cries indignantly "Where are the police?" Now the police not only know pretty well who committed those burglaries, but they even knew that they were going to be committed, or at any rate that some burglaries were going to be committed; for the simple reason that two or three days previously Messrs. Bill Sikes, Jack Sheppard, and Charles Peace, were released from one of Her Majesty's gaols. Yet they cannot arrest these gentlemen without tangible evidence of their guilt, although they may be morally certain of it. Still less can they prevent them from committing a burglary, which is what the public constantly asks. That could only be effected by arresting them before they have done anything to deserve it, and to expect it is much like asking the Fire Brigade to prevent the occurrence of fires. Even the French police, though they can arrest on mere suspicion, cannot detain suspects indefinitely without evidence. Recently they were obliged to release several Anarchists for lack of evidence, although

it subsequently turned out that these very men had actually committed the crimes of which they were suspected. There is a public outcry at this sort of thing, and yet when arrests are made on very fair evidence, which subsequently turns out to be unfounded, every one boils with indignation at the "high-handed" proceedings of the Parisian police.

It is this very "high-handedness," that is to say, the practice of arrest on suspicion, and the subsequent handling of the prisoner, that enables the Parisian police to cope as successfully as they do with crime and to perform the feats which have earned them a great name for cleverness. It has its disadvantages without doubt, such as the liability to lay hold of innocent persons. But this tends to correct itself, and happens far less often than might be expected. Every mistake of the kind exposes the authorities to trouble and public censure, and they naturally regard the officer who makes it with considerable disfavour. Policemen who commit many such blunders are dismissed, and this makes them exceedingly careful. Moreover, serious harm never results. The very treatment to which suspects are subjected, the interrogatories of the magistrate, and the elaborate system of identification are the best safeguards against a miscarriage of justice. Of course it is best that innocent persons should not be arrested at all: but mistakes are bound to happen, and when they do the fuller the investigation the more certainly will the victim's innocence be established. In Paris an English gentleman may occasionally be consigned to a cell for a few days as a pickpocket or a spy, but no man's life or liberty can be sworn away by a constable's mistake. And on the other hand the police there never experience, as our own frequently do, the peculiarly bitter mortification of seeing an atrocious criminal, whom they have been at the pains to trace, walk off scot free, simply because the law does not allow any incriminating questions to be asked of him. Every country has its own way of doing things, and in France they prefer to protect society by giving the police great legal powers in order to make up for an extremely clumsy and cumbrous organization. To blame the police for exercising those powers is silly: if they did not they would fail in their duty and all security for person and property would vanish. There would be more sense in demanding a better organization; just as in this country, instead of crying "Where are the police?" and expecting them to act with their hands tied, we should do better by giving them reasonable powers and by not providing a constant supply of criminals through the release of Bill Sikes and his friends every two or three years.

M. GORON, CHIEF OF CRIMINAL POLICE.

To understand how the Parisian police force works it will be necessary to glance briefly at its organization. The head of it is the Préfet de Police, who is responsible to the Minister of the Interior. He generally goes in and out with the Government, though during the recent shuffle of the political cards M. Lozé, the present Préfet, was allowed to remain. It is needless to say that the frequent changes involved by this arrangement—there have been as many as seven in three years—are a very bad thing for the force. The nominal head is quite in the hands of his permanent subordinates, who take very good care that he does not carry out any reforms. The Préfet controls a body of between 8,000 and 9,000 men, and his jurisdiction extends over Paris and the suburbs. The whole force is divided into numerous sections and divisions, with different duties, the chief object of which seems to be to multiply labour and cause confusion. To enumerate them all would weary the reader; it will be sufficient to mention three main heads: (1) The Office Department, (2) The Municipal Police, (3) The Criminal Police. Oddly enough, it is the last—that is, the

"detectives," as we commonly call them—who do the really interesting work, and about whom the public is always talking, but whom it never sees. When a sensational crime is brought to light, and the papers say that it is in the hands of the police, one conjures up a vision of half-a-dozen uniformed policemen stumbling helplessly about and making a dreadful mess of it. But the utterance of the word "detective" at once presents to the mind's eye a picture of some preternaturally acute individual who comes down, armed with unlimited powers, puts the muddled men of uniform quietly aside while pretending to employ them, and follows out a theory of his own, which may or may not be correct, but is always incredibly ingenious. A particular halo surrounds the Parisian "detective," who is believed to be the representative of a marvellous system of espionage and intrigue. All these notions, derived from French and American romances or from the stage, are utterly devoid of reality. But in order to explain how things really stand it will be necessary to go back for a moment to the three heads stated above.

M. GAILLARDE, CHIEF INSPECTOR.

(1) The Office Department of the Parisian police includes the numerous *bureaux* of the Préfecture and the offices of the *commissaires de police.* Some of the functions of the *bureaux* are proper enough, but so far as the main business of the police—that is the maintenance of order and the repression of crime—is concerned they are simply machines for causing delay and hindering action. They are manufactories of reports. Nothing can be done without reports, which have all to pass through the Préfet's office. When it is closed, as from Saturday evening till Monday morning, no steps can be initiated. If you are arrested on Saturday there you stop until Monday, whoever may swear to your respectability. It is easy to see how this works in criminal cases. As for the *commissaires,* they also are mainly manufacturers of reports. As an institution they may be considered the central point of a thoroughly clumsy system of administration. There are seventy-four, or perhaps eighty of them, distributed about Paris, and they combine the functions of police magistrate with those of local representative of the Préfecture. To the Parisian public "the police" means the *commissaire* and the *gardien de la paix*, or common constable. If anything happens the *commissaire* is summoned: if anything is discovered it is reported to the *commissaire.* When his office is closed, as it is at night, then nothing can be done unless they drag him out of bed. And when the good man comes, what can he do? Nothing but take an observation and indite a report. He can give no orders, as he commands no police, only a secretary, commonly called his *chien*, and two old fellows attached to his office. This is the antiquated machinery by which justice is set in motion in important criminal cases. The *commissaire* is a *brav'homme* and sometimes throws himself into the breach, as when one of them arrested Ravachol the other day with the help of the bold waiter. But what a system to leave things to be done in that way! In London an inspector would have immediately taken a couple of men and made a certainty of it. The Parisian *commissaire* cannot do that: he can only obtain assistance by sending in a report to the Préfet, who sends it over to the Criminal Department with a request that so many men may be placed at the disposal of M. le Commissaire. All this takes time, as the various offices are conveniently scattered about at con-

M. ROSSIGNOL, CHIEF INSPECTOR.

siderable distances in different parts of the town, and by the time the detectives arrive, Ravachol, or whoever it may be, has of course disappeared.

(2) The Municipal Police includes the whole force of ordinary uniformed constables or *gardiens de la paix*, and certain special departments in plain clothes. The main fact to be noted about them is that they have nothing whatever to do with criminal cases. They are a separate body under a separate chief and are much more given to helping than hindering their "detective" colleagues. The duties of the *gardiens de la paix* are to maintain public order. They are men of routine, disposed precisely as our own constables are, in divisions with a fixed area and fixed hours of patrol. If anything unusual happens within the cognisance of one of them his business is to report it to his own officer or to the nearest *commissaire*, who takes action as already explained. He may, it is true, be called upon to assist a member of the criminal force in effecting an arrest, or anything of that kind: but this very seldom happens. There is little goodwill between the two sets of men, and the detectives prefer to do their own work without help. They will often run the greatest risks rather than ask for it. The plain clothes men attached to the "municipal" force include the lodging-house inspectors and the so-called "political police." It is the existence of these political brigades that has given rise to most of the erroneous notions current about the Parisian "detectives." They really have something to do with intrigue, secrecy, and espionage, but far less than they used to have under the Empire. Their duties are mainly to attend and report political meetings — sometimes a very hazardous task—and to exercise *surveillance* over all kinds of gambling, whether carried on in clubs, in the open air, in clandestine halls, or at charity balls, where a *partie* is commonly started in some side room and is of course frequented by professional swindlers. This is a very interesting subject in itself, but we cannot linger over it here. One other section of the "political" plain clothes men remains to be mentioned: namely the "secret police," the *mouchards* and *agents provocateurs*. These creatures are much talked about but very little understood. They are not in any sense policemen at all, but mere voluntary informers, sometimes paid for their services and sometimes not. In former days this class was a good deal employed, but now they are rather discouraged.

M. ROSSIGNOL ON DUTY.

(3) The Criminal Police, to which we now come, is the most interesting section of the Parisian force. Their proper designation is the "Service de la Sûreté," corresponding to our own Criminal Investigation Department. They, and they alone, have to do with the repression of crime, the discovery and arrest of criminals. They are the real French "detectives," according to our sense of the word. There is nothing either political or secret about them, except that they wear plain clothes. The force consists of about 300 men, under a *chef*, who is responsible only to the Préfet. The present *chef* is M. Goron, whose portrait we give. His men are all attached to head-quarters at the Quai des Orfèvres, and a certain number sleep on the premises every night. They are divided into four grades; namely, chief-inspectors, brigadiers,

sub-brigadiers, and inspectors. Promotion goes solely by length of service and merit. All the senior officers, excepting the *chef*, have risen from the ranks, which are recruited from the army. The corps consists exclusively of ex-soldiers, who have served their time and have been discharged with unblemished reputations. It is found that old soldiers, and especially non-commissioned officers, as most all of them have been, form the best material for the service. The most important requisite for a good detective is not a highly educated intelligence, but devotion to duty and the habit of discipline. When the Criminal Investigation Department was first organized on its present basis, the experiment of introducing men of superior education was made; but it did not answer, for various reasons. Of course intelligence and courage and cool nerves are also necessary for success. All these a good detective must possess, and one other thing, without which the rest will not avail to bring him to distinction—I mean a real love of the career. The best Parisian detectives possess this in the highest degree. Put a crime before them, a problem with a man at the other end of it, and they are as happy and eager as the fisherman who has seen a big salmon rise, or the deer-stalker who has got his glass on a sixteen-stone stag.

M. JAUME,
CHIEF INSPECTOR.

What superior French detectives are like the reader may gather from their portraits. The stars of the force at the present time are Chief-inspectors, Gaillarde, Jaume, Orion, Sol, Soudais and Rossignol. Let us take the liberty of paying one or two visits and making their nearer acquaintance. No. 36 Quai des Orfèvres is the official domicile of the Sûreté. The building is new, but neither very convenient nor very inviting. Dark stone staircases and bare stone corridors suggest a gaol more than a public office, and the little rooms opening on the corridor are not much bigger or better furnished than cells. The Sûreté is for use, not ornament: that is reserved for the numerous circumlocution offices with which the Republic is provided. In one of these rooms we find the senior chief-inspector, M. Gaillarde. He is a man somewhat over fifty, very quiet, pleasant-mannered, calm and self-possessed; and these are in the main the characteristic attributes of all his senior colleagues. He sits writing at a table or desk piled with pigeon-holes but cheerfully interrupts his business to smoke a cigarette. The department over which he presides deals with the execution of warrants of arrest. In important cases he carries them out himself and most of the sensational criminals of late years have been arrested by his hand. His strong point is considered to be a great gift of intuition in elucidating an obscure problem. Presently two of his men enter to make a report. They are chiefly noticeable for an exceptionally ordinary appearance, if one may use the expression. It is rather disappointing at first sight to any one who knows his detective literature; but to look ordinary and not be so is obviously a great merit in the business, when you come to think of it. One of them pulls out of his pocket a specimen of the homely implement which does duty for handcuffs among these men. They call it *cabriolet*, or more correctly *ligotte*, and it consists of some twenty inches of whipcord with a small piece of wood at each end. The cord is passed round the prisoner's wrists and twisted together. The thing is more efficient than might be supposed, and your true Parisian thief-taker takes a certain pride in using simple means. He is great at ready-made and ingenious devices. One plan with a troublesome captive is to take off one of his boots, which makes him limp; another is to unfasten his clothes so that he is obliged to use at least one hand in holding them up. The men make their own *ligottes*, and sometimes produce a more formidable article by using strong wire in loops instead of whip-cord. But the real master hand disdains even the *ligotte*: he carries nothing whatever, no matter where he goes. With the majority of criminals his mere personal influence suffices to impose obedience, and when he meets with a desperate character he prefers to trust his good right hand rather than any weapon of offence. A colleague of M. Gaillarde's, chief-inspector

M. SOUDAIS,
CHIEF INSPECTOR.

M. ORION,
CHIEF INSPECTOR.

Rossignol, who shares the same office, is a notable specimen of this order of detective. He is the head of the *voie publique* department, the standing functions of which are to explore by day and night every corner of Paris and to lay hands on all evil-doers caught *in flagrante delicto*. M. Rossignol will stroll alone, with his hands in his pockets, down the worst alleys in the city: he will enter the most dangerous thieves' kitchens and the vilest dens of infamy with equal *sang froid*. He knows every inch of Paris and every door is open to him. The proprietors are all his very good friends and welcome him obsequiously, while the wretched inmates hang round him and compete for a friendly word. To say that he has no fear hardly expresses his relation to the company. It is true that he possesses extraordinary strength and activity, and has never met his match in the course of numerous personal encounters; but his ascendency is far more a matter of mind. These people recognize in him a master and also a friend. The relation between the police and the criminal classes is rather a curious social study. The latter very rarely entertain any malice or even resentment. They recognize that the police are only doing their duty, and regard the situation as a sort of game, partly of skill and partly of chance. The adversary who plays it boldly and squarely they respect and even like. In those lucid intervals when they happen to have no misunderstanding with the law, they hail the detective officer as an old friend and in some sort a comrade, especially when he knows how to talk to them in their own language, as M. Rossignol pre-eminently does. Here, for instance, in a horrible rag-picker alley, in the evil district of the *barrière*, we come across a herculean *chiffonnier*, a drunkard, a bully, and a fighter, who has been constantly in trouble. His face lights up at the sight of the inspector, he shakes hands warmly, shows him his swollen cheek—for the poor man has a bad toothache—and pours into his ears a long tale of domestic troubles. The two are friends: nor would their relations be interrupted if it became the duty of the inspector to march his friend off to the depot. To be sure every detective is not a Rossignol, who is admitted to possess in a remarkable degree the gift of inspiring confidence among those lower classes to which criminals mostly belong.

M. SOL, CHIEF INSPECTOR.

M. BRASSEY.

This personal introduction to the leading lights of the Sûreté may be completed by a visit to one of them at home. He lives in a modest suite of rooms *au troisième*—for the Republic pays some of her best servants very shabbily—over a grog shop in that historical street down which the forces of disorder are wont to march, from the seething quarter of S. Antoine westward to the palaces of the great. The inspector's sitting-room might set up for itself as a small chamber of horrors. He has a life-sized wax model of himself, seated in an armchair opposite the door, which is enough to startle you as you go in. Presumably it is intended to receive the attentions of M. Ravachol, or one of his kidney, in case he should think of making a professional call. The model is so ridiculously like the original that you hardly know which to shake hands with. The room contains numerous souvenirs, such as the knife with which a ferocious anarchist attacked our friend on the occasion of his arrest. There is a case full of medals, silver boxes, and such-like mementoes of past feats, and a photographic album of criminals whom he has been instrumental in bringing to book, everything has a history, which he will tell in the most modest matter-of-fact way; a narrative of stirring incidents enough to furnish twenty romances, a record of individual experiences in the deeps of Parisian low-life, almost past belief. One gruesome toy is exhibited with a sort of paternal affection. It is a complete working model of the guillotine with a little figure to match, which you may have the pleasure of beheading *secundum artem* then and there. The Parisian detective loves his *métier*, or he would not stick to it; for he is a man of parts and could earn a better living in many other ways. Nor can the noble pension of £40 a year, with which the Republic generously rewards his services after twenty-five years, be considered very much of a bait.

M. PRINCE, BRIGADIER.

From what has been said above about the organization of the Parisian police the *rôle* played by the officers of the Sûreté will be readily understood. They have, of course, a certain amount of routine work; but it is the important criminal cases that draw the eye of the public upon them. Their duty is to find the culprits and bring them to the depot. All such cases are reported, as has been already said, in the first instance to the *commissaire* of the district, and by him to the Préfecture. First-rate crimes are then placed in the hands of a *juge d'instruction*, minor ones are left to the *commissaire* to deal with. In either case, as many detectives as may be thought necessary are placed at the disposal of the judicial officer. If no information is forthcoming and the case remains obscure, then is the time for a good hand to show what he can do. Different men use different means according to their capacities. Some have a faculty of jumping at a correct conclusion without any apparent reason.

M. BOURLET, BRIGADIER.

The most useful and reliable method, however, is to go systematically to work, making inquiries in a quiet way without exciting suspicion. Here the art of assuming a character comes in, and at this some of the Sûreté men are adepts. The wonderful detective who appears in the morning as a bearded and swarthy organ-grinder, in the afternoon as an old applewoman, to-morrow as a languid swell or a village idiot, exists only in imagination. The real man never adopts an elaborate make-up; he has a small wardrobe of costumes, the object of which is to enable him to frequent a desired locality without exciting suspicion. The dress, therefore, is the most ordinary that is to be met with in that part. It may be that of a workman, a shopkeeper, a clerk, or a loafer. The accompanying engravings, which show M. Rossignol as he is, and in the character of a workman, will give a truer idea of the practice of disguising than any number of fancy pictures. We will suppose that our detectives have got what they want to know, and are pretty sure of their man; it remains to find him. The lodging-house inspectors or *brigade des garnis* are supposed to exist for this sort of purpose; and sometimes they are of real assistance. They would, however, be far more useful if they were attached to the Service de la Sûreté, instead of to the Police Municipale, as they are at present. The individual detective will not ask the *brigade des garnis* for assistance, if he can help it, because it would probably be refused. He continues to use his disguises, he frequents cabarets, he "shadows" a friend of the suspect, he sets a trap, he watches a house day and night, he gets taken on at a factory where the man or his friends work—in short he does a thousand things, except give up the chase; he catches his man at last, and brings him to the depot. Then his task is over; he has done his duty, and earned the reward which is paid for successful arrests. It is the business of the Anthropometric Department to identify the prisoner (which it does with marvellous certainty), of the *juge d'instruction* to extract a full confession from him, and finally of a sentimental or terrified jury to let him go again.

M. BLEUZE, BRIGADIER.

In conclusion, the Parisian police have many merits and some prominent defects, of which the most important are the following:—(1) the force is too small; (2) it is underpaid; (3) it works under the disadvantage of a cumbrous and complicated system; (4) it is really governed, like our own, by the press. Some reform has recently been effected on the first two points; the third is too big to touch, and the fourth is beyond the reach of any remedy.