

MEASUREMENT IDENTIFICATION OF CRIMINALS.

BY COLONEL HOWARD VINCENT, C.B., M.P.

AN admirable report has recently been laid before Parliament by a Committee appointed to inquire into the best means available for identifying criminals. It consisted of Mr. Troup of the Home Office, Major Arthur Griffiths, Inspector of Prisons, and Mr. Melville Macnaghten, Chief Constable of the Criminal Investigation Department. They visited Paris and most of the great centres of police work at home. They found—

“That the present system of identifying prisoners in England leaves much to be desired,” and that what is wanted is a means of ascertaining readily and with certainty the identity of a person under arrest for a criminal offence. They agreed that this is not attainable by any development of existing English methods, and only by the application of science. It must not be thought, however, that Scotland Yard has made no progress in recent years. From the formation of the Criminal Investigation Department in 1878 to the present time, the improvement in the Convict Supervision Office has been great and marked. Under Chief-Inspector Neame and his officers it greatly contributes to the identification of old offenders, while carefully avoiding hunting them down. Indeed, it very frequently assists them to an honest livelihood. But the day has now arrived

WHEN SCIENCE MUST STEP IN.

What is this Science of Identification? Its principal discoverer is M. Alphonse Bertillon, an officer of the Préfecture de Police in Paris. His attention was directed eleven or twelve years ago to the imperfect means of identifying criminals afforded by human recollection and photography. A mathematical mind was brought to bear on the subject. The usual official opposition to every novel proposition was encountered. The time and the trouble involved were magnified. The mass of details, the difficulties of search, the expense, were all insisted upon by old policemen. But it is not less creditable to the ingenuity and perseverance of M. Bertillon, than to the enlightened encouragement he has lately

received, that every objection and obstacle has been overcome. The Home Office Blue Book was the cause of a recent visit to M. Bertillon's office, and it is no disparagement to the clearness of the report to say that I became the more impressed thereby with the recommendations of the Committee that

BERTILLONAGE SHOULD BE ESTABLISHED IN ENGLAND,

and not in London alone, but as far as possible throughout the country. The Record Office in Paris is in close vicinity to the House of Detention, to which all prisoners are remanded—and unfortunately not under those favourable conditions established by Sir E. du Cane, to prevent the old contaminating the young; to prevent inter-communication between offenders; to prevent the blackmailer obtaining a knowledge which may be subsequently used with evil effect. But that is not M. Bertillon's affair. The new-comers to the dépôt strip to the shirt and in single file pass into his office. One by one they give names real or imaginary. These are taken down on a stiff and handy card. The alphabetical registers are searched, and if, as is usually the case, they disclose nothing, each subject passes into the measuring-room. He bares his arms and feet. A clerk sits at a desk as in a tailor's shop, and writes according to the instructions of the measurer. The subject is placed under the standard on the wall, great care being taken to prevent trickery.



Next comes the span of his arms.



The length and width of the right ear is then taken.



Then his height sitting.



The prisoner next stands on his left foot on a stool, and leaning his whole weight thereon (to prevent his doubling his toes under), and grasping the handle of a rest in front, its length is taken.

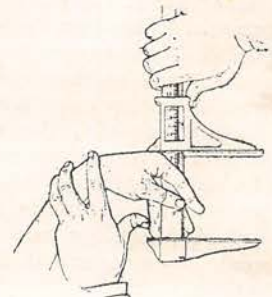


After that the length of the head is measured by the compass, from the base of the nose to the furthest point at the back,



Then with a rule the length of the middle and little fingers of the left hand are gauged ;

succeeded by its breadth.



and lastly, the length of the forearm placed flat on a rest.



The colour of the eyes is next examined in seven classes. It sounds difficult, but is in reality extremely easy. Finally comes the record of any special characteristic of the forehead, nose, or ear (of each of which there are about twelve definite classes), or of any cuts, scars, tattoo marks, &c.—not described abruptly as such, but with their situation, shape, length, and exact distance from one or more fixed points about the body.

The time occupied in all this work, and notwithstanding superintendence for greater exactitude and including transcription, was exactly five minutes, or not much more than a good tailor takes to measure for a suit of clothes.

Photography follows—not fantastic and amateur photography, but by cameras screwed into the floor, from a chair like-wise fixed, taking simultaneously the profile and the full face, and showing to a millimeter, by a scale on the chair, the exact height of the sitter.

THEN AS TO THE RESULT.

How can the thousands upon thousands of records be so classified so as to be found readily? Many will have one member of the same size, but the same size in all members is practically never met with. The smaller the classification, the easier the search. Ninety thousand descriptive forms are divided into small, medium, and large heads of thirty thousand each, the medium heads being only from 185 to 190 millimeters in length. Each "length of head" class is next subdivided into three similar classes by breadth of head of 10,000 each. Each of these three sections next go into three

others by the length of the middle finger. The 90,000 have now been subdivided into twenty-seven sections of 3,300 each. They are again divided into three of 1,100 each by the length of the foot. Again they are divided into three by the length of the forearm. Then these are divided into three heights, and again into two classes of sixty each by the length of the little finger; and, lastly, into packets of a dozen by the colour of the eye. To search the dozen is an easy operation. I myself was able with a little help to put it to a test. A prisoner came in and gave a name which he protested was his own, and that he had never been in prison before. In four minutes he was measured. In twelve minutes a packet was found containing the cards of men within the same margins of measurement. One was soon taken out which fitted him exactly. The card stated that there was a small cicatrice on the inner side of the wrist. It would never have been noticed in England. His wrist was turned, and there was the scar. A little cut three millimeters long was stated to be four millimeters above the left breast towards the left armpit, and there it was found at once by the rule. The prisoner saw that further protestation was useless. He admitted his identity with the previous card, and declared the latter bore his correct name. It showed many previous convictions. But the photograph very slightly resembled him. It would never have been picked out by the most intelligent officer. With the portrait in one's hand and the original opposite, it was just possible to trace a faint resemblance. But nothing more. Nor would personal recognition have been much more probable through a clever disguise. Identity was irrefutably established in a quarter of an hour, and it is not too much to say that by any other means it could not have been done so thoroughly, or nearly so cheaply, in three weeks or a month, if indeed at all.

THE TRUE WAY TO PREVENT CRIME

is to discover its hardened perpetrators, and remove them from the opportunity of doing more wrong. Having had the good fortune in 1887 to pass "The Probation of First Offenders Act," under which so many thousands have in the past seven years been saved, as Parliamentary returns show, from the prison taint for a first offence not the product of a criminal mind, no one will, I hope, suspect me as

being anxious to advance aught which will prove an undue hardship in its operation.

But I am convinced that Mr. Secretary Asquith's decision to adopt in this country the admirable system—for which the world is indebted to M. Bertillon, and who therein can find his only reward—is wise. There is, moreover, the high and unimpeachable authority of one who is at once a great lawyer and a great philanthropist—Sir Richard Webster. After visiting

declares the report “gives exactly the degree of accuracy that is required. A single number represents each result, while ‘twentieth parts of an inch’ give awkward and complete figures.” This is true, as has often been pointed out, and diverts from England to the Continent not a few orders from the arsenals and factories of Japan, China, and elsewhere when something of exact size is required to the thousandth part of a meter—nothing more and nothing less.



ARCH.



LOOP.



WHORL.

M. Bertillon's office, he says: “It is by far the best system I have ever seen or heard of, and possesses many remarkable safeguards against the possible identification of innocent people for those previously convicted.”

It is highly desirable in these days of international crime against the public at large that the same measurements should be taken and the same classification prevail in all countries. The omission, for instance, of the “little finger” class will only render the classes larger and more difficult to search. But indeed the Committee itself reports, “it is desirable for international purposes to have the same basis of classification in England as in France.” Another remarkable and satisfactory recommendation of the Committee is that

THE METRIC SCALE

should be employed. *The Millimètre*

The Committee recommend the adoption also of the further check of

THE FINGER PRINT

invented by Mr. Francis Galton, F.R.S. It consists in taking impressions from the bulbs immediately below the tips of the fingers and thumbs on paper or cardboard, by means of printer's ink, and dividing them into three classes known as “arches, loops, and whorls.” This may well be auxiliary to the measurement system, if considered sufficiently beyond the control of the criminal by varying strength of pressure. But again I say it would be a vast pity, on international grounds, to vary any of the almost certain measurements in M. Bertillon's system, which, already adopted in many countries, is likely soon to be general throughout the globe.