

Told by Finger Prints.

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"I HAVE the description cards of more than 200,000 criminals filed away here, but, in spite of their great number, I will guarantee to positively identify, by their use, any man who has ever passed through my hands, and I will do the work within five minutes."

It was Dr. Alphonse Bertillon, the great French expert, who spoke. He was standing in his private office, at the end of the long suite of rooms in the Paris Palace of Justice, which is given up to the Bureau of Identification. The floor of the office was marked out with chalk lines, as if some one had been drawing geometric diagrams on a large scale. Rising from the floor at regular intervals stood tall rules and measuring rods, like those used by surveyors.

The man who has done more than anyone else to make hard the way of the modern criminal, is tallish, thin, and enthusiastic in manner, looking more like a student than one of the greatest of living criminologists. He walked back into a long room lighted by skylights and half filled with cabinets of drawers running from floor to ceiling. Between each pair of cabinets stood a small desk, occupied by an assistant in a long brown linen blouse.

"In these drawers," said Dr. Bertillon, "we keep our records. And now, if you please, I will explain the system which makes it so easy to find among all these thousands, the card of the one man wanted."

"We have, let us say, 300,000 different cards in our files when a criminal whom the police do not recognise is brought in to us to be identified. First of all we measure the length of the suspect's head, from the centre of the forehead back. On the basis of this measurement alone we divide men—and our record cards—into three classes, viz. —

1. Small, length of head not greater than 7.24 in.
2. Average, length of head from 7.25 to 7.48 in.
3. Large, length of head 7.49 in. or more.

"At once, then, when this measurement is taken, we have eliminated theoretically, at least, two-thirds of the cards, leaving only 100,000 to be considered."

"Next I measure the breadth of the head from side to side, classifying men and cards, again, into three groups, according to whether this measurement is small, average, or large. By this time I have only 33,000 cards left in which to look for my man."

MEASURE FACE AND FINGERS.

"The next division is according to the length of the middle finger, leaving 11,000 cards. Further subdivisions, based on the length of the forearm, and the breadth of face across the cheek bone, bring the number down to some 1300."

"At this point I take advantage of a comparatively new and extremely interesting addition to the system. It is that of finger prints."

"When a criminal is brought to us for record we require him to ink the balls of each of the fingers on his left hand, by pressing them one at a time on a plate of copper, covered with a thin coat of printer's ink. He then presses each finger in turn on his record card, in a vacant space left for the purpose at the bottom, and thus leaves a permanent imprint."

FINGER PRINTS A TEST.

"These imprints show the design of the lines on the skin of the fingers. They are of infinitely varied form and arrangement, and differ in practically every individual. At the same time they can all be classified into four different groups, viz. —

1. Skin showing loops directed towards outside edge.
2. Oblique furrows towards inside edge.
3. Oval, circular, spiral, or volute furrows.
4. Arches and other furrows not included under previous headings.

"By classifying the remaining 1300 cards among which I must find the record card of the man under

examination, on the basis of his finger prints, I am able to throw out all but about forty. There remains only to classify these forty on the basis of the subject's height and the length of his foot. By this time there are not likely to be more than five or six cards remaining, which can be looked over in detail and the proper card picked out."

NO CHANCE OF ERROR

"But is there no fear of error?"

"With so many indices it is almost impossible," he replied. "The finger prints taken alone might possibly mislead, but not when taken in conjunction with the measurements, and so I can say, infallibly, whether a man has been through my hands before. Two years ago I had a convincing

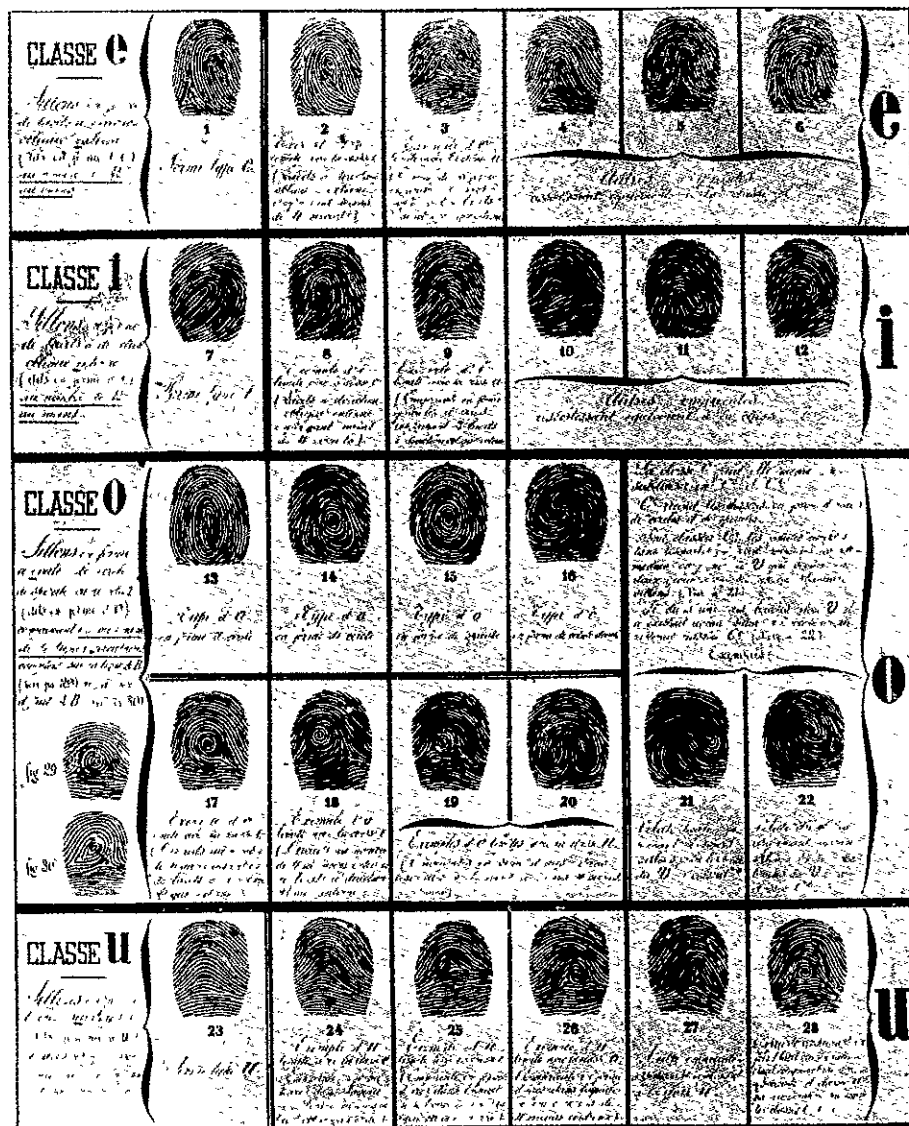
had returned after having been banished from the district or the country. I therefore prepared an album which included the photographs of 1500 criminals. That was by no means all, but that was the largest number the detectives could deal with comfortably.

HOW TO REMEMBER FACES.

"In fact it would be too much to expect that a police agent could remember 1500 portraits—the large majority of them of men he had never seen—unless there was some method of aiding his memory. I therefore devised what I call 'The Spoken Portrait.' I chose as the basis of the system the ear, which in its general conformation and in the shape of the lobe and the *tragus*, differs very much in different individuals. Besides, it can be studied without the owner's knowledge, which is a great desideratum; for if a criminal—an escaped convict say—saw a policeman staring at him full face, conscience and common sense would suggest a retreat and so put an end to the examination."

"Ears I divided into several classes, and the nose, forehead and eyebrows were treated in the same way. The colour of the eyes and hair and scars, if any, complete the description. The photographs in my album, though small, are clear and are arranged according to the system described."

"Nine years ago I first began by making experiments as to whether it would be possible to



CLASSIFIED FINGER PRINTS. DR. BERTILLON HAS REDUCED TO AN EXACT SCIENCE THE IDENTIFICATION OF CRIMINALS BY MEANS OF THEIR FINGER PRINTS

proof of the value of finger prints. A burglar broke into an office, killed the caretaker and robbed the safe. He had left his finger prints marked on a pane of glass he had broken, and these I photographed. It took my staff some time to identify them, but at last I was able to declare that the prints were identical with those of an old convict named Schiffer. He was arrested and confessed the crime.

"Of course the finger prints are of use only to aid us to recognise criminals who have been caught but it struck me some years ago that I might utilise the photographs as aids in the recognition of old offenders who were 'wanted' or suspected, or

recognise a man from an oral description. I had a class of a dozen intelligent detectives and *gendarmes*, and I made them learn the outlines of the system, and then describe one another. Then I let half my class go amongst the prisoners awaiting examination—of whom there are always fifty or a hundred every day—and take mental notes of the appearance of some half dozen men."

"Having done this, they went into a room where my other pupils were, and made 'spoken portraits' of the men they had peeked at. The others listened and were then required to go into the courtyard and find the persons described by their comrades."