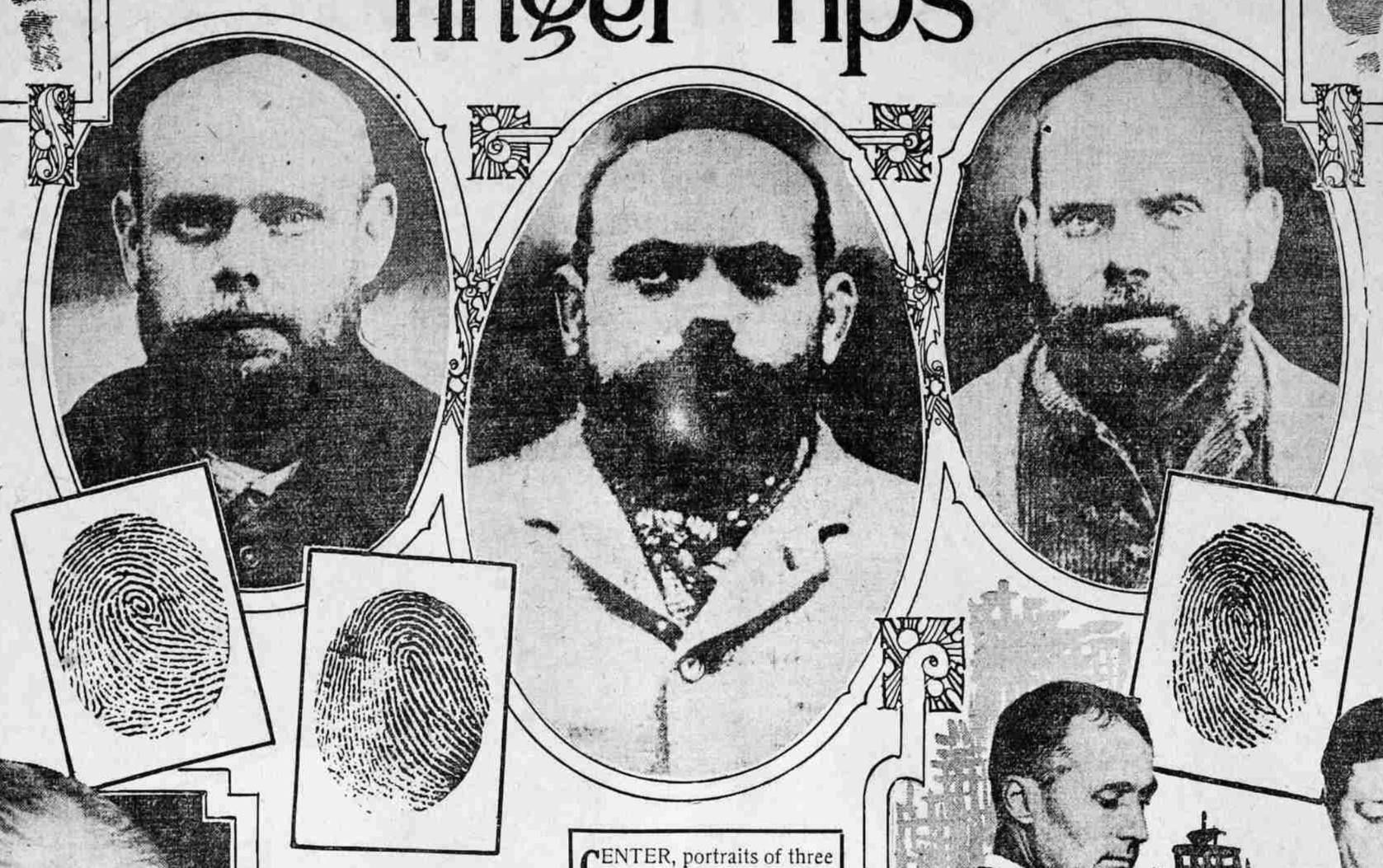
The Telltale Tracks of the Finger Tips

The Face May Be So Distorted as to Be Unrecognizable but the Tips of the Digits Remain the Same and Give Away the Secrets of Our Identity.



CENTER, portraits of three men who closely resemble each other, the thumb prints of their left hand show remarkable differences and prove their identity is not the same. Lower left, William A. Pinkerton. Lower right, Bertillon Expert John Shea taking the finger print of a bank robber. Upper left shows the bank robber's left hand. Upper right, his right hand.

BY "JOCK" BELLAIRS.

In every Bertillon Bureau of every one of the great police departments of the world there hangs a frame containing three photographs and under each a finger print. To the casual glance these photographs are of the same man. The faces are odd, the foreheads high and rounded and on each chin there is a whisker.

Invariably the visitor is shown this frame by the Bertillon expert and unvaryingly there is asked the question:

"If a man resembling these faces were to rob you on the street which one of these photographs would you pick as the thief?"

And just as regularly will come the answer, "Why, all. That is one and the same man."

Which gives the expert the opening he desires and his little laugh. He has had the finger prints covered during the period of your initiation into this mystery and now he uncovers them. Your eyes discern three prints of fingers, so radically different in the whorl and loop and delta that there is no hesitation in your pronouncing each print that of a different man. Whereupon the expert narrates the unerring character of the finger print and the fact that while it leads infallibly to the guilty criminal it is just as positive in its acquittal of an innocent man. A man may give a thousand names. He may be able to fool the Bertillon measurer, here and there, but he has no more chance to escape the print of his own finger than death. For, in the millions of people on earth, the finger print expert will tell you, it is practically impossible to find two sets of digits possessing the same characteristics.

Yet in this country, the finger print system is in its infancy. In the old countries, the experts have figured the science to such a nicety that criminals of the high class, men, who by their dexterity, can open a strong box without the aid of explosives; the higher order of thieves; bank sneaks, the "Raffles" of Europe, all who make daring plunges for high stakes, wear gloves.

This is done that the tell-tale print may not linger to give the Scotland Yards operative or the Paris sleuth, the Berlin operator or any one of the finger print savants of the old continent a chance to trace direct to the criminal by the lines, deltas, composites and other deadly clews of the hand. In Europe every known police character is on record in the finger print shops. In this country we are just beginning that. In Europe every finger or hand mark at the scene of a crime is reproduced at once, by means of fine powder and powerful lenses. Here we are thinking about it. In Europe the smudge of a blood stained finger cleared up a mysterious murder. This was in Paris. Circumstances had fastened the crime on an innocent man. The chance finger stain absolutely freed him and the classification of the print exposed and convicted the murderer. No wonder they wear gloves there.

IMPRINT OF HAND ON DOOR CONVICTS.

In New York recently an "inside" safe robbery puzzled the police. An "inside" job is a crime committed by some one connected with the concern. In this instance, the combination of the safe had been worked by some one familiar with it and some $2,500 taken. Only two men knew the combination apparently—the proprietor and the cashier. The latter was under suspicion until the Bertillon men discovered the imprint of a hand on the door above the combination, where the thief had rested the hand, supporting his body while he bent over working the combination. The print was quickly developed. Then each employe of the concern was called in and finger prints taken. It resulted in an old employe, a man never once suspected, being arrested. He confessed and restored the money. By watching the cashier he had obtained the combination.

In St. Louis two glaring instances appear to herald the unerring worth of the finger print. When "Lord" Barrington was arrested for the murder of James McCann, just about the time the finger-print system was put into operation here, John M. Shea, Bertillon expert, sent Barrington's finger prints to Scotland Yards. He appended no name and no description—just the finger prints—and asked for an identification. It came back, together with a photograph, showing Barrington to be George Barton, a notorious English criminal. And no amount of dispute, or maudlin sentiment, can ever make the Bertillon men all over the world believe that Barrington, now serving life, is anyone but Barton.

Then the instance of Jimmie Lynch, bank sneak. Lynch is not his real name. No one ever learned that. He was picked up by detectives out of curiosity, his prints were sent away. They came back from Scotland Yard branding the possessor as an international criminal.

But while the police departments hail the value of the finger system of identification, what must it be to men who delve internationally in the pursuit of crime and criminals! Such a man, for instance, as William A. Pinkerton, head of the Pinkerton National Detective Agency. Fresh from a tour of Europe—and it may be said here that Mr. Pinkerton is the only private detective permitted to co-operate with Scotland Yard—Mr. Pinkerton has the thread of the subject in hand.

GLOVES WORN TO HIDE IMPRINT.

"The system will be universal in a half decade," says Mr. Pinkerton. "In Europe the system is in such repair that criminals wear gloves. In this country the larger departments have both the Bertillon and finger-print systems. In a majority of departments only the Bertillon is used. But the worth of the finger print has come to be recognized and we may soon see it used, even to the exclusion of the Bertillon. It has so many possibilities and is so unerring that I firmly believe it is the greatest aid to society. Yet, it is practically but a well-beaten experiment at the present time. That is, its true value has not been established as yet. It's worth is known to the banks of the country, many of whom are adopting the system for the security of depositors and for the safety of each individual bank. The army uses it and so does the navy. Insurance companies, lodges, even households, will, in time, take it up. For there can be no mistake when the finger print is developed.

"Scotland Yard deserves great credit for the development of this system. Yet, though, we may say, the print system has only been lately adopted in police work, it is old, old as the world. You find it the pivot about one of Mark Twain's stories, 'Pudd'n Head Wilson,' I believe is the title. It was used in Egypt, the pressure of a monarch's thumb making the documents official. It was used in China centuries back, the race preferring this to their elaborate system of writing. To this day natives in the interior of China use it. You deal with a Chinese merchant today and he will give you a receipt signed with what? His thumb print.

"In India the system is well known and was in vogue for centuries. That is where the English got it. They learned it during their years of occupation of India. It was first used, I believe, in police work in India by Sir Edward Henry, who is, at present, head of the London Metropolitan police. He was then an officer in the Indian police. The system was introduced to Scotland Yard by Sir Melville MacNaughton. At first it was laughed at. Then Paris, Berlin and St. Petersburg fell in line and the work of co-operation, of perfecting the system was undertaken until today it is almost perfect—in Europe. England has the system down to a nicety. A uniform system is in vogue in England, Scotland, Ireland, Canada, India and Australia. The classifications are so accurate and exact in those countries that only a mere reference to the card index is needed to uncover the pedigree of a criminal.

FINGER LEFT ON PICKET A GIVE AWAY.

"I might cite a thousand incidents to show the value of the finger print system in Europe. Scotland Yard detectives tell with eclat numerous occasions when a trifling mistake of a criminal resulted in capture. For instance a burglar who robbed a safe in an aristocrat's house, neglected to take with him the paper in which he carried his tools. His oily finger prints were on the paper and the Yard had him in two days with all the loot. Still another is that of two burglars who pledged themselves in glasses of wine, just as they were leaving a house, after a successful burglary. The prints of their fingers on the glasses gave them away.

"Another, more remarkable than all, is that of a burglar, who, running from a house which he was burglarizing when discovered, jumped over a picket fence. A ring on his second finger, right hand, caught in the picket and the digit was torn from the socket and left hanging to the picket. The police found it, took a print of the tip, compared it with the records and had no difficulty in capturing the criminal."

Mr. Pinkerton's friendship with the English police began forty years ago. His was the arm that solved the theft of the Gainsborough portrait, one of the celebrated cases in detective annals, and his the head that solved the $1,500,000 theft from the Bank of England through forged bills of exchange. The Bidwell brothers and two co-conspirators were caught in the trap prepared by Mr. Pinkerton and Scotland Yards. And, incidentally the compliment was turned when Scotland Yards and Mr. Pinkerton landed the crowd which fleeced the Third National Bank of Baltimore out of $300,000.

Mr. Pinkerton's estimate of the London police, independent of its detective department, which he lauds in the highest terms, ought to be copied and placed in every police station in the United States.

"The British policeman is said to be slow in ferreting crime—but if so, he is perfect," says Mr. Pinkerton. "The London police have the most perfect system of patrol I ever saw and the roundsman and private take pride in their work. They don't shun hours and there is no such word as graft. Every policeman is courteous and accommodating. They are not allowed to carry pistols and I don't think one per cent of them do. The English law prohibits the arrest of a man on the street unless he is seen committing crime. So the London policeman investigates his case thoroughly before making an arrest. And he is sure of his case when he does arrest. He practically prepares the brief of the case, which the lawyer presents in court. Thus you can see he must be intelligent. There is no hounding of men who have been convicted of crime. A ticket-of-leave man is encouraged to get work and hold it. He is helped by the English policeman, and, where there is a tendency on the part of some of the population to hound a man once convicted, it is charming to see the manner in which the English bobby protects this man. The English policeman is phlegmatic—but efficient and kind.

"In London there is no shouting, no blowing of whistles to confuse, no bawling. The traffic policeman raises his arms and traffic stops one way or goes another.

LONDON EXCELS IN FINGER SYSTEM.

"But to the finger print again. I believe England has the system best in hand. But Paris is excellent, and Germany hard to beat. In Berlin they have an extraordinary criminal museum. They delve deepest into the analysis of evidence, blood stains, etc., hold more rigid autopsies than elsewhere and take greater pains in their pursuit of the criminal, than a great many countries. In this country we are beginning to see the wisdom of co-operation in the handling of crime. The finger print system will bring all departments closer together.

"Smaller constabularies, or even county sheriffs, are going to be wonderfully helped by a new invention, from Scotland Yard, called a neocylostyle. This is a book of white oiled paper and between these thin sheets are thin ink pads, or wet sheets of carbon paper. They are inexpensive. A Sheriff, handicapped by lack of the finger print or Bertillon systems, may carry these in his pockets and when he makes an arrest, take the finger impressions by pressing on the carbon pad and then on the oiled paper. The latter sheets may be detached and sent to any finger print bureau for classification and identification.

"There is little chance of escape in England, and so burglaries are at a minimum and great crimes now very scarce. If we get the system much more perfect the criminal will have to go around in pillows or boxing gloves."

Bull Fighters Who Make Fortunes.

Bombita, the famous Spanish bull fighter, has retired from the ring. Though only 34, he has been fighting since he was 19, and has killed in all 3,000 bulls. When he gave his last fight, on October 19 at Madrid, he had saved more than $600,000.

The average fee for a fight is $1,250 for a famous toreador. As Bombita took a part in sixty-five fights a year his income, since he became the idol of Spain, has been more than $81,250 a year. As a matter of fact, presents, special fees and so on have brought Bombita's annual income up to $250,000 during the last three years. If it were not that the matador spends freely as he earns, Bombita's fortune would have amounted to far more.

The twenty most famous bull fighters in Spain earn between them $1,000,000 a year. They are treated in a way which seems amazing to average people.

When a bull fighter visits a theater he is given the best box in the house. He is provided with the most expensive and luxurious suite of rooms in the leading hotel in the town. In fact, he is treated like a king, and greeted everywhere as a great celebrity.

Bull fighters begin as chulos, the men who wave red cloths to madden the bull, and draw about $15 a week. When qualified they become banderillos and stick darts into the bull. For this they receive anything from $25 to $250 a week. Finally they become matadors, like Bombita, and earn anything up to $1,500 for a single fight.

Antonio Fuentes, who retired in 1908, figured in about 800 bull fights, and made a fortune of $1,000,000. Rafael Guerra, generally known as Guerritta, who killed 3,000 bulls, retired a year later with a snug little fortune of $3,000,000, all made out of bull fighting.

Great Magazine.

Bingle—What do you think of the Monthly Megatherium?

Jingle—Great magazine! Fine fiction! I've just read the opening seventy pages about what it will contain during the next few months, and shall get right at the following seventy pages about what it already has this month.

Well Named.

"We call our office boy the Little Dragoon."

"Warlike little fellow, eh?"

"Oh, no! it's because he has to be booted and spurred before we can get anything out of him."