

## IDENTIFICATION BY FINGER-PRINTS.

GUIDE TO FINGER-PRINT IDENTIFICATION. By HENRY FAULDS, L.F.F.S. (Hurdley; Wood, Mitchell. 5s.)

Conflicting claims to priority in discovery or invention are more interesting to the claimants than to the public, and the man with a grievance is apt to become a bore. But the public is always willing to do justice for cause shown, and it will doubtless do justice to Mr. Henry Faulds. He states in the preface that "its aim is to give in compact and portable form, and without unnecessary technicalities, the main facts and principles likely to be found useful in medical and legal inquiries involving identification by this method." It cannot be said that this aim is very well carried out. The treatment is desultory, and if unnecessary technicalities are avoided, unnecessary quotations are not. Mr. Faulds interlards his pages with scraps of Virgil, Shakespeare, Kant, Sir Thomas Browne, De Quincey, Dickens, and Thomas Hardy, and with irrelevant references to Locke, Lotze, Wundt, Théophile Gautier, and other writers who have no more to do with finger-prints than with antiseptic surgery, which is also dragged in for casual mention in connexion with some autobiographical

details. The last furnish a clue to what seems to be the main object of the book. The author is a man with a grievance. The notice of publication draws attention to his claims in the opening sentence:—"The author of this work was the first to propose the use of finger-prints for identification, in an article in *Nature*, October 28th, 1880," and a good deal of the book is devoted to showing that he deserves the credit which has been given to others—namely, Sir W. J. Herschel, Mr. Francis Galton, and M. Bertillon; also, it may be added, to the present Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, though Mr. Faulds does not mention him—a singular omission, as he is the author of a book on the subject, and has probably had more to do with the practical application of finger-prints to police work than any one else. The facts, with the omission of Mr. Faulds's 1880 suggestion, are succinctly stated in the article on "Anthropometry," in the "Encyclopædia Britannica," Vol. XXV., to which he refers several times. He does not traverse the statements contained in that article, but he complains that finger-prints are only discussed under the heading "Anthropometry," with which they have little to do. It is not accurate to say that they have little to do with anthropometry; but the distinction as well as the connexion between the two is made perfectly clear in the article, though, perhaps, it would be better to place both under the heading of "Identification." They may have been mixed up in sundry newspapers, as Mr. Faulds complains; but if he is going to correct the mistakes that appear in newspapers he will have abundant occupation for the rest of his life.

The story of finger-prints is like that of many other discoveries; several persons have worked at them independently, and nobody can claim the exclusive credit of developing their utility. The earliest observations that have been traced are those of Parakenje, the physiologist, who published a pamphlet in 1823. He did not suggest the use of finger-prints for identification, but he distinguished types, and proposed a classification. Mr. Faulds calls it "crude and really incorrect"; most beginnings are, but classification is the essence of the matter, and priority in that cannot be denied. Then came Sir W. J. Herschel, who in 1858 made the first practical application of finger-prints to identification in India. He apparently tried it in the first instance as a happy thought in the case of a native contract, in order to circumvent the habitual evasions of justice in connexion with signatures. For the ordinary signature he substituted an impression of the man's right hand. The Clarendon Press has produced a facsimile of the first document thus executed in 1858. It contains the written contract on one side of the sheet and on the other the imprint, showing the man's palm and fingers. The success of this first rough attempt led Sir William to extend the new system of identification; he applied it to various public departments of his district in Bengal, and officially suggested its use in the jails, on the strength of twenty years' practical experience. The facts have always been recognized by Mr. Galton, by the Home Office Committee of 1869, and by Mr. Henry, to whom the successful revival of finger-prints in India was largely due; but Mr. Faulds sneers at the whole story, and insinuates doubts of its veracity. He uses the tedious, silly-clever sarcasms that are the stock-in-trade of writers with nothing to say. Speaking of the official suggestion referred to above, he says:—

It is therein stated that the "two forefingers (*sic*) of the right hand" were used. Mr. Galton, who frequently acts as a kind of graceful chorus to Sir William, explains this cryptic expression to mean the middle finger and the forefinger. The letter or report or book is addressed to some mysterious personality known *sic*, as Mr. Faulds is fond of saying) only to literature as "My dear B—," and is lamely certified as "true copy of office copy," but by whom certified is not stated. . . . Of Sir William's mute, or at least inarticulate, musings over a period of some twenty years in India, I in Japan know nothing.

If Mr. Faulds thinks his cause will be assisted by writing of this kind he must have a poor opinion of his readers. Then we come to M. Bertillon. In 1870—not 1881, as Mr. Faulds says—he suggested to the Prefecture of Police in Paris a method of identifying criminals by measurements which could be classified and indexed. It was adopted and developed into the French system of anthropometry. It had no connexion with finger-prints, but it established the principle of classifying for ready reference the records of a great number of criminals, which has since been applied to finger-prints and is essential to their utility for police purposes. In 1880—a year later, not a year earlier—came Mr. Faulds with his article in *Nature*, proposing the identification of "old and important criminals" by finger-prints. This was the first published suggestion, and was no doubt quite original on the part of the writer, to whom belongs all the credit due. But it does not go very far. The thing was not taken up; Mr. Faulds does not appear to have applied it practically himself, and though he subsequently worked out a system of classification, he has not published it. From his own account it is not the system worked out several years later by Mr. Galton and published in 1892, nor the system adopted in Bengal in 1864, extended to the whole of India in 1867, and subsequently to Great Britain. "Of his mute, or at least inarticulate, musings" in Japan, therefore, we know nothing. The practical part of his present book deals chiefly with the methods of examining finger-marks left on objects, suggested by some recent criminal cases, which are discussed.