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# COMPOSITE PORTRAITS.

BY

FRANCIS GALTON, F.R.S.

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HARRISON AND SONS, ST. MARTIN'S LANE,  
Printers in Ordinary to Her Majesty.  
1878.

GALTON/2/13/3/21

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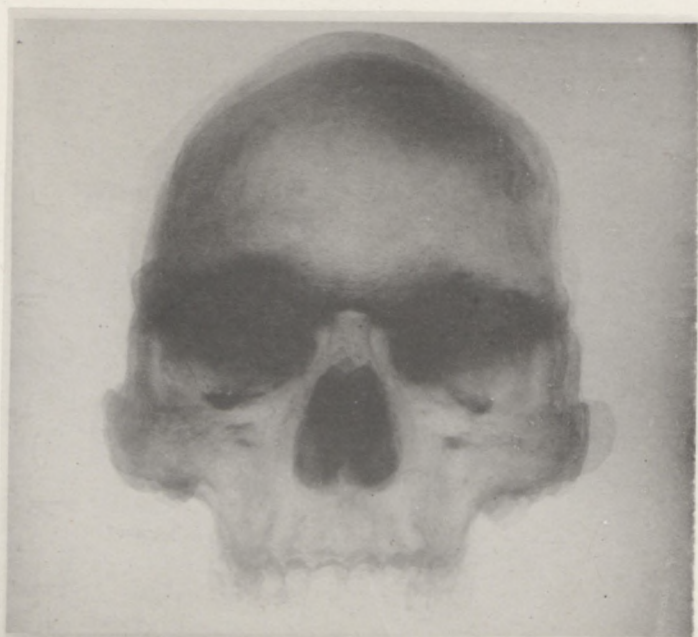
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COMPOSITE PORTRAITS, *made by combining those of many different persons into a single resultant figure.* By FRANCIS GALTON, F.R.S.

I submit to the Anthropological Institute my first results in carrying out a process that I suggested last August in my presidential address to the Anthropological Subsection of the British Association at Plymouth, in the following words:—

“Having obtained drawings or photographs of several persons alike in most respects, but differing in minor details, what sure method is there of extracting the typical characteristics from them? I may mention a plan which had occurred both to Mr. Herbert Spencer and myself, the principle of which is to superimpose optically the various drawings, and to accept the aggregate result. Mr. Spencer suggested to me in conversation that the drawings reduced to the same scale might be traced on separate pieces of transparent paper and secured one upon another, and then held between the eye and the light. I have attempted this with some success. My own idea was to throw faint images of the several portraits, in succession, upon the same sensitised photographic plate. I may add that it is perfectly easy to superimpose optically two portraits by means of a stereoscope, and that a person who is used to handle instruments will find a common double eyeglass fitted with stereoscopic lenses to be almost as effectual and far handier than the boxes sold in shops.”

Mr. Spencer, as he informed me had actually devised an instrument, many years ago, for tracing mechanically, longitudinal, transverse, and horizontal sections of heads on transparent paper, intending to superimpose them, and to obtain an average result by transmitted light.

Since my Address was published, I have caused trials to be made, and have found, as a matter of fact, that the photographic process of which I there spoke enables us to obtain with mechanical precision a generalised picture; one that represents no man in particular, but portrays an imaginary figure possessing the

average features of any given group of men. These ideal faces have a surprising air of reality. Nobody who glanced at one of them for the first time, would doubt its being the likeness of a living person, yet, as I have said, it is no such thing; it is the portrait of a type and not of an individual.

I begin by collecting photographs of the persons with whom I propose to deal. They must be similar in attitude and size, but no exactness is necessary in either of these respects. Then, by a simple contrivance, I make two pinholes in each of them, to enable me to hang them up one in front of the other, like a pack of cards, upon the same pair of pins, in such a way that the eyes of all the portraits shall be as nearly as possible superimposed; in which case the remainder of the features will also be superimposed nearly enough. These pinholes correspond to what are technically known to printers as "register marks." They are easily made: A slip of brass or card has an aperture cut out of its middle, and threads are stretched from opposite sides,



making a cross. Two small holes are drilled in the plate, one on either side of the aperture. The slip of brass is laid on the portrait with the aperture over its face. It is turned about until one of the cross threads cuts the pupils of both the eyes, and it is further adjusted until the other thread divides the interval between the pupils in two equal parts. Then it is held firmly, and a prick is made through each of the holes.

The portraits being thus arranged, a photographic camera is directed upon them. Suppose there are eight portraits in the pack, and that under existing circumstances it would require an exposure of eighty seconds to give an exact photographic copy of any one of them. The general principle of proceeding is this, subject in practice to some variation of details, depending on the different brightness of the several portraits. We throw the image of each of the eight portraits in turn upon the same part of the sensitised plate for ten seconds. Thus, portrait No. 1 is in the front of the pack; we take the cap off the object glass of the camera for ten seconds, and afterwards replace it. We then

remove No. 1 from the pins, and No. 2 appears in the front ; we take off the cap a second time for ten seconds, and again replace it. Next we remove No. 2 and No. 3 appears in the front,



which we treat as its predecessors, and so we go on to the last of the pack. The sensitised plate will now have had its total exposure of eighty seconds ; it is then developed, and the print taken from it is the generalised picture of which I speak. It is a composite of eight component portraits. Those of its outlines are sharpest and darkest that are common to the largest number of the components ; the purely individual peculiarities leave little or no visible trace. The latter being necessarily disposed equally on both sides of the average, the outline of the composite is the average of all the components. It is a band and not a fine line, because the outlines of the components are seldom exactly superimposed. The band will be darkest in its middle whenever the component portraits have the same general type of features, and its breadth, or amount of blur, will measure the tendency of the components to deviate from the common type. This is so for the very same reason that the shot-marks on a target are more thickly disposed near the bulls-eye than away from it, and in a greater degree as the marksmen are more skilful. All that has been said of the outlines is equally true as regards the shadows ; the result being that the composite represents an averaged figure, whose lineaments have been softly drawn. The eyes come out with appropriate distinctness, owing to the mechanical conditions under which the components were hung.

A composite portrait represents the picture that would rise before the mind's eye of a man who had the gift of pictorial imagination in an exalted degree. But the imaginative power even of the highest artists is far from precise, and is so apt to be biassed by special cases that may have struck their fancies, that no two artists agree in any of their typical forms. The merit of the photographic composite is its mechanical precision, being subject to no errors beyond those incidental to all photographic productions.

I submit several composites made for me by Mr. H. Reynolds. The first set of portraits are those of criminals convicted of murder,

manslaughter, or robbery accompanied with violence. It will be observed that the features of the composites are much better looking than those of the components. The special villainous irregularities in the latter have disappeared, and the common humanity that underlies them has prevailed. They represent, not the criminal, but the man who is liable to fall into crime. All composites are better looking than their components, because the averaged portrait of many persons is free from the irregularities that variously blemish the looks of each of them.

I selected these for my first trials because I happened to possess a large collection of photographs of criminals, through the kindness of Sir Edmund Du Cane, the Director-General of Prisons, for the purpose of investigating criminal types. They were peculiarly adapted to my present purpose, being all made of about the same size, and taken in much the same attitudes. It was while endeavouring to elicit the principal criminal types by methods of optical superimposition of the portraits, such as I had frequently employed with maps and meteorological traces,\* that the idea of composite figures first occurred to me.

The other set of composites are made from pairs of components. They are selected to show the extraordinary facility of combining almost any two faces whose proportions are in any way similar.

It will, I am sure, surprise most persons to see how well defined these composites are. When we deal with faces of the same type, the points of similarity far outnumber those of dissimilarity, and there is a much greater resemblance between faces generally, than we who turn our attention to individual differences are apt to appreciate. A traveller on his first arrival among people of a race very different to his own thinks them closely alike, and a Hindu has much difficulty in distinguishing one Englishman from another.

The fairness with which photographic composites represent their components, is shown by six of the specimens. I wished to learn whether the order in which the components were photographed made any material difference in the result, so I had three of the portraits arranged successively in each of their six possible combinations. It will be observed that four at least of the six composites are closely alike. I should say that in each of this set the last of the three components was always allowed a longer exposure than the second, and the second than the first, but it is found better to allow an equal time to all of them.

The stereoscope, as I stated last August in my address at

\* "Conference at the Loan Exhibition of Scientific Instruments," 1878. Chapman and Hall. Physical Geography Section, p. 312, "On Means of Combining Various Data in Maps and Diagrams," by Francis Galton, F.R.S.



Plymouth, affords a very easy method of optically superimposing two portraits, and I have much pleasure in quoting the



The accompanying woodcut is as fair a representation of one of the composites as is practicable in ordinary printing. It was photographically transferred to the wood, and the engraver has used his best endeavour to translate the shades into line engraving. This composite is made out of only three components, and its three-fold origin is to be traced in the ears, and in the buttons to the vest. To the best of my judgment the original photograph is a very exact average of its components: not one feature in it appears identical with that of any one of them, but it contains a resemblance to all, and is not more like to one of them than to another. However the judgment of the wood engraver is different. His rendering of the composite has made it exactly like one of its components, which it must be borne in mind he had never seen. It is just as though an artist drawing a child had produced a portrait closely resembling its deceased father, having overlooked an equally strong likeness to its deceased mother, which was apparent to its relatives. This is to me a most striking proof that the composite is a true combination.

following letter, pointing out this fact as well as some other conclusions to which I also had arrived. The letter was kindly forwarded to me by Mr. Darwin; it is dated last November, and was written to him by Mr. A. L. Austin, from New Zealand, thus affording another of the many curious instances of two persons being independently engaged in the same novel inquiry at nearly the same time, and coming to similar results.

“ Invercargill, New Zealand,  
“ November 6th, 1877.

“ To CHARLES DARWIN, Esq.

“ SIR,—Although a perfect stranger to you, and living on the reverse side of the globe, I have taken the liberty of writing to you on a small discovery I have made in binocular vision in the stereoscope. I find by taking two ordinary *carte-de-visite* photos of two different persons' faces, the portraits being about the same sizes, and looking about the same direction, and placing them in a stereoscope, the faces blend into one in a most remarkable manner, producing in the case of some ladies' portraits, in every instance, a *decided improvement* in beauty. The pictures were not taken in a binocular camera, and therefore do not stand out well, but by moving one or both until the eyes coincide in the stereoscope the pictures blend perfectly. If taken in a binocular camera for the purpose, each person being taken on one half of the negative, I am sure the results would be still more striking. Perhaps something might be made of this in regard to the expression of emotions in man and the lower animals, &c. I have not time or opportunities to make experiments, but it seems to me something might be made of this by photographing the faces of different animals, different races of mankind, &c. I think a stereoscopic view of one of the ape tribe and some low caste human face would make a very curious mixture; also in the matter of crossing of animals and the resulting offspring. It seems to me something also might result in photos of husband and wife and children, &c. In any case, the results are curious, if it leads to nothing else. Should this come to anything you will no doubt acknowledge myself as suggesting the experiment, and perhaps send me some of the results. If not likely to come to anything, a reply would much oblige me.”

“ Yours very truly,

“ A. L. AUSTIN, C.E., F.R.A.S.”

Dr. Carpenter informs me that the late Mr. Appold, the mechanician, used to combine two portraits of himself under the stereoscope. The one had been taken with an assumed stern expression, the other with a smile, and this combination produced a curious and effective blending of the two.

Convenient as the stereoscope is, owing to its accessibility, for determining whether any two portraits are suitable in size and attitude to form a good composite, it is nevertheless a makeshift and imperfect way of attaining the required result. It cannot of itself combine two images; it can only place them so that the office of attempting to combine them may be undertaken by the brain. Now the two separate impressions received by the brain through the stereoscope do not seem to me to be relatively constant in their vividness, but sometimes the image seen by the left eye prevails over that seen by the right, and

*vice versa.* All the other instruments I am about to describe accomplish that which the stereoscope fails to do: they create true optical combinations. As regards other points in Mr. Austin's letter, I cannot think that the use of a binocular camera for taking the two portraits intended to be combined into one by the stereoscope would be of importance. All that is wanted is that the portraits should be nearly of the same size. In every other respect I cordially agree with Mr. Austin.

The best instrument I have as yet contrived and used for optical superimposition is a "double-image prism" of Iceland spar. The latest that I have had were procured for me by Mr. Tisley, optician, 172, Brompton Road. They have a clear aperture of a square, half an inch in the side, and when held at right angles to the line of sight will separate the ordinary and extraordinary images to the amount of two inches, when the object viewed is held at seventeen inches from the eye. This is quite sufficient for working with cartes-de-visite portraits. One image is quite achromatic, the other shows a little colour. The divergence may be varied and adjusted by inclining the prism to the line of sight. By its means the ordinary image of one component is thrown upon the extraordinary image of the other,

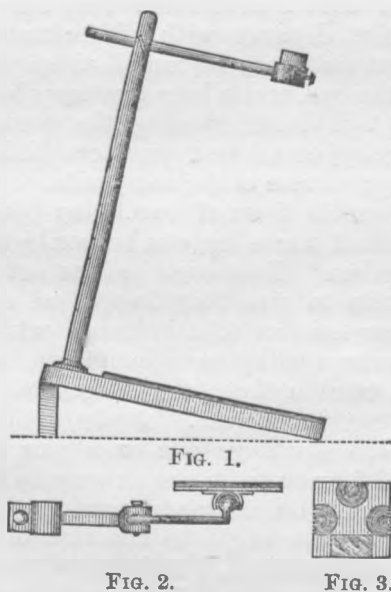


Fig. 1 shows the simple apparatus which carries the prism and on which the photograph is mounted. The former is set in a round box which can be rotated in the ring at the end of the arm and can be clamped when adjusted. The arm can be rotated and can also be pulled out or in if desired, and clamped. The floor of the instrument is overlaid with cork covered with

black cloth, on which the components can easily be fixed by drawing-pins. When using it, one portrait is pinned down and the other is moved near to it, overlapping its margin if necessary, until the eye looking through the prism sees the required combination; then the second portrait is pinned down also. It may now receive its register-marks from needles fixed in a hinged arm, and this is a more generally applicable method than the plan with cross threads, already described, as any desired feature—the nose, the ear, or the hand, may thus be selected for composite purposes. Let A, B, C, . . . X, Y, Z, be the components. A is pinned down, and B, C, . . . X, Y, Z; are successfully combined with A, and registered. Then before removing Z, take away A and substitute any other of the already registered portraits, say B, by combining it with Z; lastly, remove Z and substitute A by combining it with B, and register it. Fig. 2 shows one of three similarly jointed arms, which clamp on to the vertical rod. Two of these carry a light frame covered with cork and cloth, and the other carries Fig. 3, which is a frame having lenses of different powers set into it, and on which, or on the third frame, a small mirror inclined at  $45^\circ$  may be laid. When a portrait requires foreshortening it can be pinned on one of these frames and be inclined to the line of sight; when it is smaller than its fellow it can be brought nearer to the eye and an appropriate lens interposed; when a right-sided profile has to be combined with a left-handed one, it must be pinned on one of the frames and viewed by reflection from the mirror in the other. The apparatus I have drawn is roughly made, and being chiefly of wood is rather clumsy, but it acts well.

and the composite may be viewed by the naked eye, or through a lens of long focus, or through an opera-glass (a telescope is not so good) fitted with a sufficiently long draw-tube to see an object at that short distance with distinctness. Portraits of somewhat different sizes may be combined by placing the larger one further from the eye, and a long face may be fitted to a short one by inclining and foreshortening the former. The slight fault of focus thereby occasioned produces little or no sensible ill-effect on the appearance of the composite.

The front and profile faces of two living persons sitting side by side or one behind the other, can be easily superimposed by a double-image prism. Two such prisms set one behind the other can be made to give four images of equal brightness, occupying the four corners of a rhombus whose acute angles are  $45^\circ$ . Three prisms will give eight images, but this is practically not a good combination; the images fail in distinctness, and are too near together for use. Again, each lens of a stereoscope of long focus can have one or a pair of these prisms attached to it, and four or eight images may be thus combined.

Another instrument I have made consists of a piece of glass inclined at a very acute angle to the line of sight, and of a mirror beyond it, also inclined, but in the opposite direction to the line of sight. Two rays of light will therefore reach the eye from each point of the glass; the one has been reflected from its surface, and the other has been first reflected from the mirror, and then transmitted through the glass. The glass used should be extremely thin, to avoid the blur due to double

reflections; it may be a selected piece from those made to cover microscopic specimens. The principle of the instrument may be yet further developed by interposing additional pieces of glass, successively less inclined to the line of sight, and each reflecting a different portrait.

I have tried many other plans; indeed the possible methods of optically superimposing two or more images are very numerous. Thus I have used a sextant (with its telescope attached); also strips of mirrors placed at different angles, their several reflections being simultaneously viewed through a telescope. I have also used a divided lens, like two stereoscopic lenses brought close together, in front of the object glass of a telescope.

I have not yet had an opportunity of superimposing images by placing glass negatives in separate magic lanterns, all converging upon the same screen; but this or even a simple dioramic apparatus would be very suitable for exhibiting composite effects to an audience, and, if the electric light were used for illumination, the effect on the screen could be photographed at once. It would also be possible to construct a camera with a long focus, and many slightly divergent object glasses, each throwing an image of a separate glass negative upon the same sensitised plate.

The uses of composite portraits are many. They give us typical pictures of different races of men, if derived from a large number of individuals of those races taken at random. An assurance of the truth of any of our pictorial deductions is to be looked for in their substantial agreement when different batches of components have been dealt with, this being a perfect test of truth in all statistical conclusions. Again, we may select prevalent or strongly-marked types from among the men of the same race, just as I have done with two of the types of criminals by which this memoir is illustrated.

Another use of this process is to obtain by photography a really good likeness of a living person. The inferiority of photographs to the best works of artists, so far as resemblance is concerned, lies in their catching no more than a single expression. If many photographs of a person were taken at different times, perhaps even years apart, their composite would possess that in which a single photograph is deficient. I have already pointed out the experience of Mr. Appold to this effect. The analytical tendency of the mind is so strong that out of any tangle of superimposed outlines it persists in dwelling preferably on some one of them, singling it out and taking little heed of the rest. On one occasion it will select one outline, on another a different one. Looking at the patterns of the papered walls of our room, we see, whenever our fancy is active, all kinds of



forms and features. We often catch some strange combination which we are unable to recall on a subsequent occasion, while later still it may suddenly flash full upon us. A composite portrait would have much of this varied suggestiveness.

A further use of the process would be to produce from many independent portraits of an historical personage the most probable likeness of him. Contemporaneous statues, medals, and gems would be very suitable for the purpose; photographs being taken of the same size, and a composite made from them. It will be borne in mind that it is perfectly easy to apportion different "weights" to the different components. Thus, if one statue be judged to be so much more worthy of reliance than another that it ought to receive double consideration in the composite, all that is necessary is to double either the time of its exposure or its illumination.

The last use of the process that I shall mention is of great interest as regards inquiries into the hereditary transmission of features, as it enables us to compare the average features of the produce with those of the parentage. A composite of all the brothers and sisters in a large family would be an approximation to what the average of the produce would probably be if the family were indefinitely increased in number, but the approximation would be closer if we also took into consideration those of the cousins who inherited the family likeness. As regards the parentage, it is by no means sufficient to take a composite of the two parents; the four grandparents and the uncles and aunts on both sides should be also included. Some statistical inquiries I published on the distribution of ability in families\* give provisional data for determining the weight to be assigned in the composite to the several degrees of relationship. I should, however, not follow those figures in the present case, but would rather suggest, for the earlier trials, first to give equal "weights" to the male and female sides; thus the father and a brother of the male parent would count equally with the father and a brother of the female parent. Secondly, I should "weight" each parent as four, and each grandparent and each uncle and aunt as one; again, I should weight each brother and sister as four, and each of those cousins as one who inherited any part of the likeness of the family in question. The other cousins I should disregard. The weights as previously mentioned would be bestowed by giving proportionate periods of exposure.†

\* "Hereditary Genius," p. 317, column D. Macmillan. 1869.

† Example:—There are 5 brothers or sisters and 5 cousins, whose portraits are available: the total period of desired exposure is 100 seconds,  $5 \times 4 + 5 = 25$ ;  $\frac{100}{25} = 4$ ; which gives  $4 \times 4 = 16$  seconds for each brother or sister, and 4 seconds each cousin ( $5 \times 16 + 5 \times 4 = 100$ ).

Composites on this principle would no doubt aid the breeders of animals to judge of the results of any proposed union better than they are able to do at present, and in forecasting the results of marriages between men and women they would be of singular interest and instruction. Much might be learnt merely by the frequent use of the double-image prism as described above, which enables us to combine the features of living individuals when sitting side by side into a single image.

I have as yet had few opportunities of developing the uses of the composite photographic process, it being difficult, without much explanation, to obtain the requisite components. Indeed, the main motive of my publishing these early results is to afford that explanation, and to enable me to procure a considerable variety of materials to work upon. I especially want sets of family photographs all as nearly as possible of the same size and taken in the same attitudes. The size I would suggest for family composites is that which gives four-tenths\* of an inch (or say 10 millimetres) interval between the pupil of the eye and the line that separates the two lips. The attitudes, about which there can be no mistake, are full face, an exact profile (say, always showing the *right* side of the face), and an exact three-quarters, always showing the left; in this the outer edge of the right eyelid will be only just in sight. In each case the sitter should look straight before him. Such portraits as these go well into cartes de visite, and I trust that not a few amateur photographers may be inclined to make sets of all the members of their family, young and old, and of both sexes, and to try composites of them on the principles I have described. The photographs used for that purpose need not be in the least injured, for the register marks may be made in the case into which they are slipped, and not in the photographs themselves.

#### DISCUSSION.

Sir EDMUND DUCANE said: I had no intention of making observations on the lecture given Mr. Galton, but as I have been called on, I will explain my connection with the observations on making which, as Mr. Galton has explained, his experiments originated. In considering how best to deal with and repress crime, it occurred to me that we ought to try and track it out to its source and see if we cannot check it there instead of waiting till it has developed and then striking at it. To track crime to its source we must follow up the history of those who practise it, and specially in such lines as are likely (as has been alleged) to contain the true clue to their criminal

\* I said *half-an-inch* in the original paper, but have since, for various reasons, adopted four-tenths of an inch instead, as my standard size.—August, 1878.

career. Among these subjects for observation that of the hereditary disposition is one of the most important, and to disentangle the effect of this from the effect of the bringing up. Mr. Galton very kindly undertook to try and ascertain if anything could be established on these points, and I therefore furnished him with the particulars of the personal characteristics and career of a great number of criminals and with their photographs. It seems to me to be a correct inference that if criminals are found to have certain special types of features, that certain personal peculiarities distinguish those who commit certain classes of crime; the tendency to crime is in those persons born or bred in them, and either they are incurable or the tendency can only be checked by taking them in hand at the earliest periods of life. Mr. Galton's process would help to establish this point, because if there is any such distinguishing feature it would come out in his mixed photographs in a clear line, whereas in those features which do not correspond the lines would be more or less blurred. I should anticipate that a great number of those who commit certain classes of crimes would be found to show an entirely inferior mental and bodily organisation; but on the other hand a very large number of criminals are rather superior in intelligence; so much so that I was quite recently informed by Colonel Pasley, the Director of Admiralty Works, that his observation was that convicts picked up a knowledge of a new trade with much greater rapidity than free workmen. In fact, it is often misplaced and unbalanced cleverness that leads to the attempt to commit crime, and this characteristic might very probably be found in the features of criminals of this class.

Mr. CORNELIUS WALFORD, after expressing his interest in the subject under discussion, drew attention to the fact that changes of location and of climate, possibly also of food, tended very materially to alter family and even national types of facial expression. As an instance, children of Irish parents born in the United States present usually quite a classical form of face, notwithstanding that the parents, in many cases, bore the strongest marks of nationality. Sir Charles Dilke, in his "Greater Britain," says that the same thing takes place in the Australian Colonies. It seems clear from this that even criminal types will not hold good under all circumstances. He did not quite know how this might affect Mr. Galton's theory. He also thought that experimenting upon a number of persons tended rather to generalise than to particularise the expression. These remarks were to be regarded as suggestions only.

Mr. ROBERT DES RUFFIÈRES said: Mr. Galton's paper on "Composite Portraits" is both curious and suggestive, and may perhaps lead to important results in time to come. As it is, the author considers his discovery may be turned to good account in several ways, and notably as a means of comparing the average features of a family with those of its near ancestry. If I recollect rightly, Mr. Galton laid great stress on the eyes as one of the most important features, and especially in connection with his views, and no doubt with good reason; but it should not be forgotten that the

mouth also is a very characteristic feature, and it is not many years ago that a celebrated French painter undertook to show that it was possible to group the several personages of a historical picture, in such a way as to bring visibly before the mind of the spectator the passing scene, and that without the eyes of any of the *dramatis personæ* being visible. Mr. Galton's discovery has been spoken of elsewhere as a toy, but the same was said at the time of the Kaleidoscope, which has done such good service in the Arts, and very recently of the Radiometer, which it has been shown can be successfully applied in Climatology for testing gas-light, and other purposes.

Mr. HYDE CLARKE said it was necessary to accept Mr. Galton's results under the reservations and conditions he had imposed. Otherwise there was a danger of adopting wrong conclusions, as a mean or average did not represent a natural fact, but was an artificial term. Thus in the examples before them the criminal characteristics were eliminated, and they had a natural type of man instead. Thus, instead of a typical figure or a distinctive type, only an average was obtained. With regard to the question which had been raised as to change of character in America, he had termed the phenomena Creolism. Some men and animals underwent change and removal from one district to another, and it was recorded that in India some horses died by simple removal. It was remarkable that the phenomena known to us as "Yankeesim" were common to the United States and Australia. In the case of an emigrant bringing children of English type, then one child subsequently born might be of American type and another of English type. This appeared to affect English and Celts, but he had not traced it to Spaniards. It was to be observed that all Americans had not the Yankee type, but that many had a thorough English type. This showed that Creolism is not purely an influence of soil. Further, the Yankee type was produced in England, but rarely. There were various influences of removal, as, for instance, the effect on the skin and eyes of our African travellers.