

THE BOOK AND ITS STORY.

THE WONDERS OF A FINGER-PRINT.*

It is a "far cry" from the Gipsies to Mr. Francis Galton, but there is something in common between them. As out of astrology was born astronomy, and as chemistry is the offspring of alchemy, so is the science of finger-prints the descendant of palmistry. In the lines of the hand the soothsayers of Chaldaea read the fate, fortunes, and character of men. The Greeks practised the art, even Aristotle giving it his sanction in the remark that the length of the lines indicates the length of the individual's life. Of mediæval literature there was plenty enough, books not only on chiromancy, which interpreted the palm-markings, but on chiromony, which saw the key to character and destiny in the general shape of the hand and the lines and joints of the fingers. Of course these fell into the usual grouping of everything under the sacred number seven. When Galileo reported his discovery of the satellites of Jupiter, the Jesuit Sizzi told him that he must be wrong, because otherwise the division of the week into seven days would have to be given up! And so it was throughout. Ingenuity saw in the bosses at the base of the thumb and fingers and near the wrist the further proof of seven planets, and no more. The "mount" at the base of the forefinger was named after Jupiter, and denoted pride; that near the wrist was called the "mount of the moon," and indicated folly. And so on, till we meet the survivals of the old palmistry in the fortune-telling Romany leading captive silly servant-girls unwares to this day.

Following on his long and valuable studies in heredity, Mr. Galton published a book on "Finger-Prints" three years ago. In this he did not deal with the well-marked creases and folds which chiromancy interprets and which have no significance. For these show the lines of flexure or bending, nothing more. But he dealt with the so-called "papillary ridges," which fill the spaces within these, and which are especially noticeable in the bulb of each finger, "variously curved or whorled, having a fictitious resemblance to an eddy between two currents." An imprint is obtained by inking the fingertips and pressing them on paper; and as the ridges retain their pattern unchanged through life, Mr. Galton, following up a method used by Sir William Herschel in Bengal forty years ago, saw in these finger-prints a surer record of identity than bodily features furnish. Sir William adopted it as a check against personation; and in a country where few could write their names, and where their features are not easily distinguished by Europeans, the taking of finger-marks as sign-manuals made reputation hopeless. The practice was extended to the jails, where the imprint of the prisoners' fingers was taken; and the thorough way in which Mr. Galton has worked out the application of the method to the habitual criminal classes led the Committee appointed by Mr. Asquith to approve it in their report on the registering and identifying of offenders. M. Bertillon's system, which takes measurements of various parts of the body, is, in Mr. Galton's judgment, less trustworthy, because the patterns and ridges of the finger-prints are proved to persist through life. "In all the cases examined, there was only one instance in which a minute detail was found to vary—a case where a ridge, which bifurcated in an impression taken at the age of two and a half, was found to have united at the age of fifteen." More striking even than this are the evidences of variation in the patterns on fingers. Suffice it that Mr. Galton's conclusion is that, if the number of the human race is reckoned at 1,600,000,000, there is a smaller chance than one to four that the print of one finger of any person should be exactly like that of any finger of any other person. The prints of one finger, if clearly taken, are therefore enough to decide the question of identity or

non-identity, and if the prints of three or more fingers be taken and compared, all possibility of error is absolutely eliminated.

"Finger-Prints" was followed by a supplemental volume on the "Decipherment of Blurred Finger-Prints," and now Mr. Galton, who is nothing if not thorough, proposes in the present volume to establish a Finger-Print Directory! Just as the names of thousands of householders in London can be learned by looking at their addresses in the "Post Office Directory," so Mr. Galton suggests that the names of persons should be found out through their finger-prints! Not upon single impressions, although, as shown above, no two finger-prints in the whole world are so alike that an expert would fail to distinguish between them, but upon classification according to "three or four well-marked appearances, which variously occur in the several fingers." The details of this classification cannot be given here, and, moreover, they need the aid of the illustrations which Mr. Galton has added. Referring our readers to these, it must here suffice to say that the classification is based on three types, arches, loops, and whorls, to one or other of which every finger-print may be assigned.

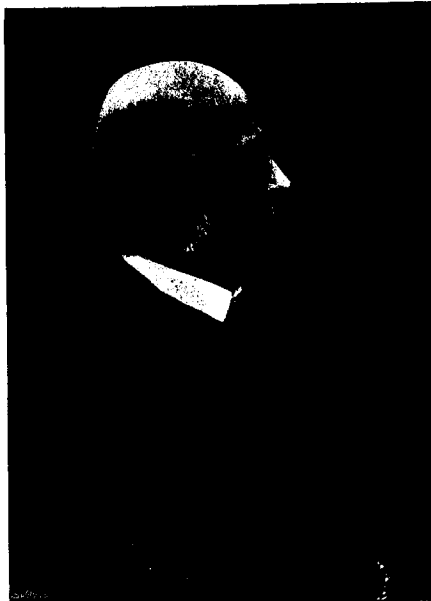
But there is nothing new under the sun. Prehistoric man had it all, as we may say, at his "fingers' ends." There has been found in Brittany a tumulus, in the chamber of which are large stones, ornamented with a series of ridges which resemble those on the finger-tips. The inference from these is that man imitated the patterns on his fingers for artistic purposes, as his somewhat more remote ancestors scratched rude pictures of mammoth and reindeer on fragments of bone or slate. Thus, through history, man has given his "hand" as his "seal," the surest and most unchanging of all forms of signature. "So," as Mr. Galton remarks, "when a chief presses his hand, smeared with blood or grime, upon a clean surface, a mark is left in some degree characteristic of him. It may be that of a broad, stumpy hand, or of a long, thin one; it may be large or small; it may even show lines corresponding to the principal creases of the palm. Such hand-prints have been made and repeated in many civilised nations, and have even been impressed in vermilion on their State documents, as formerly by the Sovereign of Japan. Though mere smudges, they seem, in a slight degree, to individualise the signer; while they are, more or less, clothed with the superstitious attributes of personal contact."

In this notice less space has been given to Mr. Galton's latest volume than to his earlier, because this has all the interest which belongs to a historical treatment of the subject. Looking over the vivid details and specimen columns of his proposed Digital Directory, we measure a long time before Messrs. Kelly need tremble for the threatened competition. But the utility of the finger-print method in the registration of criminals is clear, and with such success the learned and painstaking author may well rest content.

E. C.

AT THE GERMAN REEDS.

The personnel of the German Reed company has been altered considerably since the time-honoured Entertainment was re-started in the summer by Mr. Henry D. Reed. The names of Miss Elsie Cross and Miss Marie Garcia are now absent from the bill, and Mr. Rutland Barrington has returned to his old love, the Savoy. The company, as now constituted, includes Miss Kate Tully, who comes back to familiar boards now that the West-End run of "The Passport" is over. Another interesting point relates to the number of operatic performers at present engaged at the German Reeds'. Besides Mr. Hilton St. Just and Mr. Charles Wilbrow, there are Miss Ethel McAlpine, once well known in the D'Oyly Carte companies; Miss Chrystal Duncan, who used to be one of Mr. J. W. Turner's chief sopranos; Mr. Roland Carse, an actor-vocalist of much experience in Gilbertian opera; and Mr. Furneaux Cook.



MR. FRANCIS GALTON, F.R.S.

*"Finger-Print Directories." By Francis Galton, D.C.L., F.R.S., &c. London: Macmillan and Co.