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Marine (1896) Department.

G.O., No. 682 *new*

DATED 2nd October 1896

[Despatch Abstract.]

Anthropometric System: Pro: Judicial ~~Comm~~ Dept
Contg: Govt of India endorsement forwarding
copies of papers regarding the progress made during
1895 in Bengal in working the — for the identifica-
tion of old offenders, Comd to the Pres. Port
Officer & the Chairman, H. T. Board.

Communicating Endorsement
of the Govt of India forwarding
Copies of papers regarding the
progress made during 1895 in
Bengal in working the — for
the identification of old offenders.

Communicating to the Hon'ble the Judges of the High Court, &c., endorsement of the Government of India forwarding copies of papers regarding the progress made during 1895 in Bengal in working the — for the identification of old offenders.

GOVERNMENT OF MADRAS.

JUDICIAL DEPARTMENT.

READ—the following paper:—

From C. W. BOLTON, Esq., C.S., Officiating Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial Department (Police Branch), to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, dated Muzaffarpur, the 13th July 1896, No. 4-J.T.

In continuation of the letter from this office, No. 3989-J., dated the 24th July 1895, I am directed to submit, for the information of the Government of India, the enclosed copy of a report * from the Inspector-General of Police, regarding the progress made during 1895 in Bengal in working the anthropometric system for the identification of old offenders, together with a copy of the circular addressed to all District Superintendents of Police, containing instructions for classifying and deciphering finger-impressions and for describing them.

ENCLOSURE.

From E. R. HENRY, Esq., I.C.S., Inspector-General of Police, Lower Provinces, to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, dated Darjeeling, the 24th June 1896, No. 10500-T.

In continuation of the previous reports specified in the margin of this letter, I submit information regarding the progress made during 1895 in this province in working the anthropometric system for the identification of old offenders.

2. Full details have already been given regarding (1) the persons selected for measurement; (2) the particular measurements adopted; (3) improvements in the measuring instruments; (4) the system of search, including the margin allowed for error due to the personal equation of measurers; (5) the arrangements made in all districts for the early registration of unidentified suspects; (6) the means placed at the disposal of the local police for verifying antecedents without reference to the Central office; and lastly, figures of the criminal record up to the end of 1894, and of the cases worked out through anthropometry. In this report, therefore, it is only necessary for me to bring the statistical information up to date, and to offer some remarks on the practicability of gradually substituting for anthropometry a system based upon classified finger-prints not supplemented by measurements.

3. A register is kept at each sub-division (the unit in this province of police administration) of persons not identified at the time of their arrest. During 1895, 1,761 persons were registered as unidentified. Of these, the district police subsequently, by inquiry and by referring to their indexes, succeeded in recognizing 1,120 and ascertaining their antecedents; the number remaining unidentified being 641. These figures exclude statistics for the area under the Commissioner of Police, Calcutta, which will be separately referred to. Of the 641 persons whom the local police failed to recognize, the Central office succeeded in identifying 162, equivalent to 25.7 per cent.; the figures for the preceding year being 536 unidentified, 112 recognized by Central office, equivalent to a percentage of 21.

The figures for 1895 include 10 females and 31 juveniles who, under our rules, are not liable to measurement, and 90 non-British subjects belonging to Native States where anthropometry has not yet been introduced, and who, consequently, cannot have been registered on anthropometric data. If these 131 persons are excluded from the total of unidentified as representing cases not recognizable by anthropometry, the figure of success rises to 31.6 against 27 in the preceding year.

In addition to the 162 cases from Bengal districts, 44 persons were traced for the Calcutta Police and 1 for Assam, bringing the total of successful cases up to 207, against 143 in the preceding year.

4. In 54 of these, the name and residence given by the suspect proved to be correct. But as criminals, in order to defeat inquiries, sometimes give the correct name and address of persons other than themselves, this information, until verified, was of no value. Unless witnesses had been called, it would not, without the assistance of anthropometry, have been possible to ascertain whether the name given was the real name of the suspect or of some other person. This information might, of course, have been verified by calling witnesses, but this would have entailed delay, and the courts are averse to granting remands unless there are grounds for believing that the police have a good clue. In all cases, unidentified suspects give names and residences which three times out of four prove to be wrong, and much labour, expense and delay is avoided by calling in the aid of anthropometry, and up to the present time, it has in no instance caused the wrong person to be identified. The Central office is in a position to state with absolute certainty that the measurements and thumb-impressions sent for examination belong to a person who, under the name they specify, was convicted in a certain place on a certain date. All, then, that is necessary is to get this information verified to the satisfaction of the courts in the manner prescribed by law, viz., by obtaining an extract from the records of the court where the conviction was had, or by producing a certificate from the officer in charge of the jail where the punishment was inflicted, together with evidence as to the identity of the accused with the person so convicted.

5. A specially interesting instance of the effectiveness of the system occurred during the year. Two cases of professional robbery by poisoning were reported within a couple of days of each other in the Darbhanga district. The detective entrusted with the inquiry had no difficulty in ascertaining that the culprit was one Runjit Dusadh alias Kokil Dusadh, registered poisoner and ex-convict, a resident of the adjoining district Muzaffarpur. He was not to be found, having absconded, and there was in consequence no further clue. Weeks afterwards, some travellers were taken out of the train at Dacca, apparently so helplessly drunk that it was deemed necessary to send them to the hospital. There the drunkenness was ascertained to be *dhatara* poisoning. The district police, who took up the inquiry, could get little assistance from the victims, who continued for some time in a condition of incoherency; but, on chance, they arrested a stranger to the place, who had been seen in company with the drugged men. He stoutly protested his innocence, and disclaimed any acquaintance with them, giving his name as Ram Saran Singh, and an address up country. Being at fault, the local police measured him and took his thumb-impression, which they forwarded to the Central office, where he was at once recognized as the missing Runjit alias Kokil Dusadh wanted in the Darbhanga cases—a man who, under various aliases, had been convicted in several districts, having passed 12½ years in jail. Upon being confronted with accurate details of his past life, he admitted his identity and his guilt in the Dacca cases, and was sentenced at the sessions there to eight years' imprisonment, and has now been forwarded for trial in the Darbhanga cases. Had it not been for the clue given by anthropometry, this dangerous criminal might have escaped, for without his admission of guilt he might not have been convicted, owing to the difficulty of proving the administration of the poison. Dacca is some five hundred miles or more from Muzaffarpur, and the identity of Ram Saran Singh with the missing Runjit alias Kokil Dusadh, would not even have been suspected.

6. Considering the comparatively short time the system has been working in Bengal, the results obtained must be considered satisfactory, as about 1 in 3 of possible cases are being recognized, while it is not improbable that amongst those remaining unidentified, are persons not previously convicted, and whose measurements consequently could not have been taken for record.

7. But although the success achieved is as great as could have been expected, experience has brought into relief some inherent defects of the system which detract from its value. Notwithstanding the improvements effected in the instruments, both of which are automatic in their working, one being self-registering, the error due to the "personal equation" of measurers cannot be eliminated or even reduced to a negligible quantity. The measurer may take incorrect measurements through inattention to rules; or, having obtained accurate results, may read them incorrectly; or having read them correctly, they may be incorrectly transcribed; or the measurements of A may be transcribed as B's measurements. Every check that experience can dictate has been adopted, and that these checks are fairly effective our results demonstrate. Still, the margin for error is considerable, and if the sustained attention now given to this subject be relaxed at any time, results will certainly fall off.

8. It has been claimed for the anthropometric system that the probability of all six measurements of any two persons coinciding is so small that a fraction with a denominator of five figures is required to represent it arithmetically. The assertion would be correct if no allowance had to be made for the "personal equation" error. But, in practice, such allowance, and a considerable allowance, has to be made, the result being that coincidences in measurements are not unfrequent. In the Central office no positive deduction as to identity from measurements is considered safe or is made, reliance being placed exclusively in determining identity, upon similarity in the innumerable details which make up the pattern of the thumb-impression.

9. A system of identification by means of finger-impressions would have the following amongst other advantages over anthropometry. The assessories, a piece of tin and some printers' ink, are inexpensive and procurable everywhere; the impressions are self-signatures, free from possible errors of observation and transcription; any person of ordinary intelligence can learn to take them with a little practice after a few minutes' instruction; no objection can be raised on the score of religion or caste, or rank in society or even sex; their characteristics being persistent throughout life, the finger-impressions of a child could be used to identify the same person when he had reached middle or old age; the patterns which appear on these impressions are easily recognizable and are susceptible of such succinct and exact definition (under the system explained in the Police circular, copies of which accompany this report), that the most complicated pattern can be described in four or five words with sufficient completeness for purposes of comparison; and lastly, the evidential value of identity obtainable from the scrutiny of the prints of two or three fingers is so great that no person capable of weighing it, would deem it necessary to seek for confirmation elsewhere.

10. The problem which remains to be solved is whether it is possible to devise a system of classification based solely upon finger-impressions, which will give sufficient power of differentiation to enable duplicates to be unerringly traced in a collection of the finger-impressions, say, of 20,000 persons. This problem is now being worked at, and so far, results are not unpromising, serious difficulty being experienced in respect of only two combinations. With extended experience, these difficulties may be overcome; but as, up to the present, the impressions of only about 5,000 persons have been classified, it would be premature to express an opinion as to whether a solution is probable.

11. Being impressed with the advantages which a system of identification by finger-impressions would possess over anthropometry, I have endeavoured to popularise amongst police officers a knowledge of the subject by issuing a circular which explains by means of diagrams, the details of patterns, their classification, and the points to be kept in view when attempting to decipher them. I forward some copies of this circular for the information of Government, as it may prove of use in the registration and other departments. A number of police officers have acquired a good working knowledge of the details of finger-print decipherment, and their number is being added to, as it is one of the subjects of the training school curriculum.

No. 3-Police—447.

Copy forwarded to the Government of Madras, for information, in continuation of the endorsement from this department, No. 584, dated 15th August 1895.

(By order.)

HOME DEPARTMENT (POLICE),
Simla, 20th July 1896.

(Signed) L. M. THORNTON,
Dy. Secy. to the Govt. of India.

ORDER—No. 1469, Judicial, dated 11th September 1896.

Communicated to the Hon'ble the Judges of the High Court, all departments of the Secretariat, and the Inspectors-General of Police, Prisons, and Registration.

(True Extract.)

H. M. Thornton
for Chief Secretary.

To the Hon'ble the Chief Justice, with C.L.
,, all Departments of the Secretariat.
,, the Inspector-General of Police.
,, the " of Prisons.
,, the " of Registration.

Exd C. M. Thambuswamy.

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