

On the 31st March last the finger-print collection consisted of 3,500 slips, each slip containing the prints of a separate offender.

During the short period that this branch has been in operation no less than 117 criminals who would otherwise have escaped as first offenders were by means of their finger-prints identified as previously convicted persons, whose whole previous criminal histories were thus collected, and have now been registered in the Finger-print Branch for future reference.

Of this number, 3 important identifications took place at New Scotland Yard, [London, through finger-print impressions of persons in custody here being transmitted to the Metropolitan Police for identification. In like manner, 10 identifications resulted in Australia (9 at Sydney and 1 at Melbourne); the remainder (104) being identifications of persons in custody in the colony whose previous convictions were unknown through change of address and false names recorded.

Many of those identified had previously undergone various terms of imprisonment for serious offences, some having served long terms of penal servitude. The importance, therefore, of having a record of the criminal history of such offenders can readily be understood.

The true value, however, of this system of identification can only be realised when it is universally adopted and has been in practice for a number of years, as the longer it is established the more important and useful does it become.

It is satisfactory to observe that most of the Police Forces of the Australian States have recently introduced the system to their Departments, so that in future finger-print impressions can be exchanged in a similar manner to that at present carried out with photographs, and will be productive of better results.

The introduction of this branch of the service does not dispense with the continuance of photographs being used as a means of tracing criminals, although it will materially lessen the number required for identification purposes. A complete system of filing all photographs of criminals, with easy reference to their finger-prints, has now been formulated in the Finger-print Branch, and will no doubt prove very serviceable in the detection of crime.

A register is also kept in this branch containing a complete record of all convictions known against each criminal whose finger-prints have been registered, so that, in the event of any criminal being arrested hereafter whose finger-impressions had previously been taken, a reference to the Finger-print Branch will disclose not only the identity of the accused, but reveal his or her whole previous criminal history. This register should act as a "ready reckoner," and prove invaluable in years to come, saving considerable loss of time, expense, and labour in endeavouring to trace the previous criminal records of prisoners.

A case has recently arisen which clearly demonstrates the value of the finger-print system of identification. A man named John Pinerio was arrested and committed to trial at Sydney on a charge of housebreaking. His finger-prints were taken and forwarded here in the usual way for identification, with the result that they were at once found to be identical with those of Otto Heerdigan, *alias* Adams, who escaped from the lawful custody of a warder at Dunedin in November last whilst undergoing a sentence of two years and six months' imprisonment for extensive housebreaking in this colony. Pinerio was acquitted on the Sydney charge, and has since admitted his identity with Heerdigan, *alias* Adams, his extradition being now demanded. This criminal would undoubtedly have escaped identification if the finger-print system had not been established.

I am satisfied that the establishment of this branch was an important step in the right direction as regards the identification of criminals.

TRAINING-DEPOT, CANDIDATES, ETC.

The training-depot continues to work well, and its effect on the men who have passed through it is very marked.

The benefit to the public arising from the instruction in ambulance-work received by every man who passes through the depot is demonstrated from time to time by the efficient "first aid" rendered in cases of accidents, &c.

Instruction in the system of taking the finger-prints of persons for the purposes of identification is now imparted to all men passing through the depot.

The number of eligible candidates continues to be very much in excess of the vacancies to be filled. At the commencement of the year under review there were several hundreds of eligible candidates on the list.

During the year there were 140 fresh candidates, who, after inquiry, measurement, &c., were found to be eligible for the service.

Forty-three men were taken on during the year. The nationalities, religions, and occupations of these 43 men are as follows:—Nationalities: New-Zealand-born, 32; English, 1; Irish, 3; Australian, 6; Canadian, 1. Religions: Church of England, 18; Presbyterians, 9; Roman Catholics, 12; Wesleyans, 3; Primitive Methodist, 1. Occupations: Labourers, 18; farmers, 4; storemen, 2; clerks, 2; blacksmiths, 2; brickmaker, 1; engine-driver, 1; drover, 1; platelayer, 1; carpenter, 1; bookseller and stationer, 1; baker, 1; prison warder, 1; asylum warder, 1; shop-assistant, 1; storekeeper, 1; contractor, 1; miner, 1; photographer, 1; bridgeman, 1.

POLICE PROVIDENT FUND.

On the 31st March last the amount standing to the credit of the fund was £21,798 11s. 3d., being an increase on the year of £3,375 6s. On the same date there were on the fund 3 ex-inspectors, 12 ex-sergeants, 20 ex-constables, 1 ex-detective, and the widow and 2 orphans of a deceased constable, their aggregate annual allowances being £3,548 17s. 8d.

Since the Act came into force the Government have saved the sum of £11,343 15s. 7d. in the form of retiring-allowances, which would no doubt have been paid had it not existed.