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## School of Scientific Police in Rome

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## THE SCHOOL OF SCIENTIFIC POLICE IN ROME.

VICTOR VON BOROSINI.

I was asked last year to translate an article written by Professor Salvatore Ottolenghi on the School of Scientific Police at Rome. It was extremely difficult to follow the learned professor's arguments and reasoning, but evidently something absolutely new was being tried in the eternal city. It seemed that the Roman experiment deserved a more intimate study. As I had to be in the capital of Italy last summer, I made a special effort to spend my early morning hours at the school, where I met with the kindest reception, not only by the director and the staff, but also by the pupils. Moreover, through Professor Ottolenghi's kindness, I got the permission to visit prisons, reformatories, police stations and other institutions in and around Rome and Naples. Being for weeks in daily contact with the teachers and students, I was able to form an opinion on the practical results of the teaching and the influence of the teachers on their pupils. It has rarely been my privilege to meet a group of students who were as enthusiastic about the theoretical and practical side of their work, and who at the same time, had such a high conception of the great responsibility of their future work as police commissioners, as the men in the school in Rome.

Professor Ottolenghi is an Italian alienist of very high standing in his science. His master was Cesare Lombroso, with whom he studied in Turin, and whose theories, though slightly modified, are the guiding principles of the school. Ottolenghi initiated a course in applied psychology, criminal anthropology and the task of the public police at the University of Sienna in 1896. He continued his work in the Tuscan city until 1901, when the authorities in Rome became interested in the possibilities of the course and promoted him to a professorship in Rome, where he continued his teaching. The police administration of Italy is placed in the hands of the secretary of the interior. The honorable Giolitti was at the head of the department at that time and the director of the bureau of public safety was Signor Leonardi. Both men rendered most valuable assistance to the school by putting at its disposition all the resources of the capital. The lectures are given at the prison of Regina Coeli, where over 1500 prisoners are serving time, where others are kept pending trial, and which serves as an exchange for hundreds of men and women who every year are, for disciplinary or other reasons, transferred to other prisons or labor colonies. Hence there is a wealth of material which can be used for school purposes. The secretary of

the interior soon made the course obligatory for police commissioners, who, having successfully passed their civil service examination, served for one year on probation before they could be finally appointed. The institution has grown very rapidly. Every progress made in scientific police work was tried in Rome and if promising success, was incorporated in the curriculum of the school. Here Italy's service of identification is centralized. It can be said without exaggeration, that the brains of the Italian police administration lies in the school of Regina Coeli. From all over Italy lower police officers are sent for a period of several years to acquaint themselves with the different methods of taking finger prints, photographs and measurements.

Professor Ottolenghi explained at the Brussels Congress of Legal Medicine in 1910 his conception of a scientifically administered police, and it seems best to use his language freely in this place.

He contended that scientific principles had been applied in police work long before Bertillon had made public his system of ten measurements and two observations for identification. This method was undoubtedly the best for identifying persons, until the dactyloscopic method was developed by Mr. Henry of London, who was recently murdered in that city. Dactyloscopy is now substituted for the method of the French scientist. By applying scientific methods more generally, the police is going to become more efficient in preventing and fighting criminality. The sciences of anthropology, biology, and psychology inform and enlighten us on the physical and psychological characteristics of men, criminal sociology on the influence of the *milieu*, which is of the greatest consequence on human actions. The police commissioners need moreover a thorough legal training in order to know the extent and the limitation of their own rights and powers. The utmost circumspection should be used in successfully tracking and following up criminals from the very beginning immediately a crime has been detected. Therefore, investigations at local inquests should be made methodically in order that nothing which may throw a light on the case, may be overlooked. Reports to superior officers and to the investigating or directing magistrates should be absolutely reliable and impartial statements of facts; if, as is permissible, the police commissioner advances any theories of his own, he must expressly say so. The cross-questioning of witnesses and prisoners by a man who knows human psychology, will produce better results than have been obtained hitherto. He is able to look out for quite insignificant changes in the expression of a witness, as muscular contractions and change of color, which reveal psychological reactions. Criminal anthropology informs us of the danger of certain criminal

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types to society, and only this criterion ought to determine the length of a prison sentence, or permanent segregation, or the kind of supervision a criminal should submit to while at liberty. Such knowledge ought not to be gained exclusively from books, therefore police commissioners must be brought into personal contact with different types and study them just as the sick are studied in clinics and hospitals by medical students and physicians.

Having identified a prisoner, people would, as a rule, be in ignorance of his personal characteristics, had Lombroso not taught us to draw an inference as to the psychological characteristics of the individual from cranial types, scars and tattoos. The criminal's card record must, if it shall be of any practical use, contain information about his former life and surroundings, as well as about his former penal record. The police, in using scientific methods, is better able to protect society, especially by segregating criminal types in time and thus preventing their propagation. Such measures of moral hygiene are already extensively used in treating some cases of minors and incorrigible criminals. The treatment of prisoners by the police has undergone a revolution. Brutal force and coercive measures have been abandoned for quite as effective but more humanitarian methods which frequently win their good will and confidence.

That is the substance of Ottolenghi's paper, let us now review the practical working out of his theories at the school itself.

It is located not far from the Vatican, on the right side of the Tiber, and is practically a part of the prison of Regina Coeli. The school is a modern building, guarded by soldiers and turnkeys, constructed expressly for its purposes. On the first floor is the office of the director, a small museum of criminology, the Bertillon and dactyloscopic records and the Rogues' gallery. The museum is an imitation of many similar institutions in European capitals. It contains little of interest excepting Professor Ivanovici's marvelous work of making disfigured heads so lifelike that an identification is possible. The case records contain a complete collection of the cards of Italian criminals and a large number of European exchange cards, as foreign police departments send their cards directly to the school of scientific police, which is the distributing agency for Italy. A modern laboratory for the microscopical and chemical examination of sperma, traces of poison and blood is here installed, which is of the greatest value to the public prosecutor, the investigating magistrates and the Roman police. In the psychological laboratory the most up to date apparatus is used for registering psychological phe-

nomena, but very simple instruments are used also, which police commissioners may have at their disposal later on.

The second story is used by the service of identification and dactyloscopy, it contains also the rooms of the staff, the library and the class room. The latter is an amphitheatre with antiquated, uncomfortable seats for the pupils, which would not be tolerated in a primary school. The benches may be right for boys of 12, but they are absolutely unfit for grown-up men. It seems extraordinary that the state which used excellent discretion in fitting out the school with the best modern science has produced, should have so little consideration for the comfort of the students. This is not only the case in the classroom. The men have no place in which to gather except the staircase and the hallway; the toilet rooms are of inferior type and there are no lavatories. Unfortunately, a good deal of spitting is done, the spittoons are not much used and cleanliness is rather marked by its absence. Moreover, the classroom is overcrowded; instead of two on a bench, we find often three sitting close together. The auditorium is fitted up so that cinematographic and stereopticon performances may be given. The criminals, who have consented to appear before the class for study purposes, are brought here directly from the prison.

The upper story is used by the photographic service and by the director of the service of identification.

On the teaching staff, in addition to the director of the school, Professor Ottolenghi, are his secretary, Dr. Falco, Dr. Gasti, who is at the head of the service of identification, Signor Ellero, who is in charge of the photographic department, and Signor Bertini, who lectures on police administration and legal matters. They are all picked men, and belong to the governmental service of police as police commissioners. The students are about 27 years of age. The civil service law requires them to have practiced law for at least two years. They have all served their time in the army, and many have a doctor's degree in law or sociology. Nevertheless, they are treated as schoolboys. They are addressed by the professors in the same way in which an Italian speaks to servants. Since they are mostly from Southern Italy, they are a highly excitable group, in which the spirit of youth breaks loose quite frequently. Though a number of more dignified and sober minded Northerners try to subdue and pacify them, they occasionally run wild and, as a punishment, the director keeps the whole class after hours at the school. The men receive about \$20.00 a month from the government; they live around town during their four months' period of instruction; a few are married. Between courses and in the evening I met them on the corso and we had

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many animated discussions about police matters in Italy and in the United States. I had their kind co-operation whenever I wanted to see either in Rome or Naples the actual working of the police at the station houses and in night patrol work, especially in the vice-infected or segregated districts of both cities.

Professor Ottolenghi gives four weekly lectures on criminal anthropology and psychology as applied to police work, so that the students become familiar with normal and criminal types of man. It is a theoretical and practical course, in which for study purposes use is made of the prisoners at Regina Coeli and of the inmates of the insane asylum, five blocks away. The school is temporarily transferred to the asylum, when demonstrations of insane patients take place. The art of interrogation and of observation is taught by employing life men as subjects. Their unconscious movements show instantly the reaction certain questions produce. Particular precautions are taken to avoid the suggestion of answers to witnesses or prisoners, though it is considered perfectly proper to assist the memory in different ways to make people recollect incidents or facts which they had forgotten. The evidence is weighed and discussed and the students learn to discriminate between essential and minor points. Racial, regional and somatic characteristics, together with psychological anomalies, determine the degree of danger of a criminal to society. During his demonstrations Professor Ottolenghi presents and questions different representatives of the same type. A small sum of money, which the prisoners or others who are tested may spend as they please, makes them willing to submit to the tests. This means, besides, a welcome break in the monotony of prison life; for here they can talk as much as they want, the more the better. I quote from Ottolenghi's introductory remarks to show how this part of the work is carried on:

"I am going to present to you to-day three prisoners guilty of crimes against persons. Let us first get all the available information about their age, occupation and birthplace. The age gives us the possibility to form an idea about the physical and psychological development of the delinquent; the occupation, about his habits; the birthplace about the *milieu* in which he has grown up. The two latter are highly important factors. As we know, for instance, that certain trades, like the butchers, predispose people to commit acts of violence, while in different parts of the country, thefts, sexual crimes or such of violence predominate. When we proceed to the bodily examination of the man, we must be mindful that certain external characteristics often correspond to a certain stage in the mental development. The physical examina-

tion generally reveals to us some facts about the former life of the man, by finding scars, tattoos and the like. In addition we can ascertain whether he was and still is fit to do hard work or not. We finally arouse in the individual psychological reactions, by which the man's inner self may be revealed. By clever and rapid questioning he might be caught unaware and show certain feelings which he might wish to hide."

After this general introduction the personal and prison records of the man are read, whereupon he is introduced. He is asked to strip to the waist by removing his coat, necktie and shirt, for the physical examination. The students follow the examination with intense interest and frequently call Professor Ottolenghi's attention to some salient facts. They constantly interrupt and show their appreciation of directorial eloquence and science by generous applause. The students are often asked to take an active part in the personal examination and interrogation. Ottolenghi possesses a wonderful and highly dramatic power of making the prisoners talk. The students are later examined on the different cases and are classified according to their answers. The prisoner is treated with kindness and consideration, so as not to hurt his sensitiveness. He is invited to speak freely and without restraint of his family life, his experiences while at work and in the army, about his ideals and his conception of society. A murderer thus often expresses his disdain for a pickpocket, a safe blower for a common thief. Though the code of honor differs from the generally accepted standard, honor and *omertà* exist after their own fashion in the *mala vita*. The men had frequently served 10 to 13 years behind the bars, and showed the degrading and evil influence of prison life. I was highly impressed by the seeming inefficacy of the Italian prison system, which turns the men into automatic machines or moral and physical wrecks. The reader will easily see how valuable a practical course of the described kind is for future police commissioners, whose whole life is devoted to the work of preventing crimes and to hunting up criminals. I know from what the students told me that the school requires a good deal of study time for mastering alone the material presented by Ottolenghi in these two courses. The only danger in my mind is that Lombroso's theories could be accepted by the students as the absolute truth, and therefore be applied rather mechanically. If his theory about the delinquent were invulnerable, it would be an easy matter to suppress and prevent crime by the permanent segregation of criminal types. Ottolenghi takes special care to instruct students in scientific methods of investigation and in reporting properly the ascertained facts. The men are warned against remov-

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ing or touching anything which may lead to the detection of the perpetrator of the crime until the responsible magistrate has arrived at the scene of the crime.

Ottolenghi uses the Roman Morgue at the island of San Bernardino for his practical demonstrations of legal medicine. The different characteristic signs of death, outward signs of the causes of violent death, differences between homicides and suicides are taught. Thus police commissioners are enabled to form an adequate opinion on the discovery of a body as to the probable cause of his death, which must of course be substantiated by a rigorous medical post mortem. In the chemical department of the school a survey is given on the condition of the blood, caused by different forms of death, on the examination of sperma and other stains and on the contents of the stomach and intestines when poisoning is suspected. The idea is not to substitute police commissioners for expert physicians and chemists, but to give them a practical, though superficial knowledge of the methods used in scientific examinations. The whole school is occasionally invited to be present at inquests and investigations, and on such occasions the students are even asked to co-operate with the local authorities in finding the criminal. Many students voluntarily join the Roman police in their night patrol work in order to become familiar with the problems and the conditions of the capital.

The teaching of the science of identification is in the hands of Dr. Gasti. After a profound study of European methods he has worked out an individual dactyloscopic system for this service which is adopted for the whole kingdom. His course comprehends the description of the characteristics of a person, including special marks, like scars and tattoos, the teaching of exactly measuring the different parts of the body in accordance with Dr. Bertillon's method, and the proper classification of the cards thus obtained. Finally the taking of finger prints and the classification of the cards according to his own method. Dr. Gasti is absolutely convinced that the dactyloscopic method, together with a photograph, both profile and full face, of the accused, will in the future be substituted for the Bertillon system in the whole world, and for this reason he favors discontinuing the taking of measurements. The Italian dactyloscopic cards contain, besides the finger prints and the two photographs, a history of the criminal's life, surroundings, and specialty. According to the latter some of the cards are classified also. They are kept up to date; police and prison authorities regularly notify the central bureau at the school about the movements of the more dangerous criminals. In case a serious crime has been committed it is not very difficult

to find from the cards the men who at the time are not confined, and who among them is probably the responsible perpetrator of the crime. Prospective witnesses are taken to the bureau of identification to look over the pictures, and are asked to pick out the man they have seen where the criminal act was committed. The finger prints of suspected prisoners are sent to Rome, together with photographs of discovered finger prints in the place. At the school of scientific police they are photographed again, enlarged and compared with cards having similar indices. It might be of interest to know that cases have been not uncommon where even the identity of dead persons has been established by finger prints. Dr. Gasti and Dr. Falco give a more elementary course to exceptionally well qualified members of the Roman police force and prison guards on this very important subject of identification and taking finger prints. Thus all the prisons and each central police station through Italy have a couple of men able to take finger prints and classify them and also to find the dactyloscopic records according to a given index.

Instructions in photography includes the theoretical part, elementary courses and finally the application of the science for police purposes. Above all, the students learn to make use of light and shade in order to get the best pictures of scenes or of persons, which bring out characteristics. Again here the most modern and very common cameras are used, which may be found in every place. How photography can be used, to detect falsified banknotes, counterfeit checks, erasures and the like, forms part of this course.

Being trained and experienced lawyers before they enter the service the men have naturally a good knowledge of law. But experience has shown that a course in the application and administration of police law is a necessary complement to the school's instruction. This is given by a man thoroughly acquainted with the matter. If the time is available other legal points are taken up from the point of view of the police, especially such as are related to the legal position and the duties of the police.

It is really an immense field which the police commissioners are asked to master in the short time of four months. I happened to be in Rome when examinations began; the entire conversation during the last days was about the questions they would be asked and the scientific knowledge Professor Ottolenghi expected them to have acquired.

How far-reaching the influence of the school is may be gathered from the fact that not a few police commissioners, stimulated by Ottolenghi, have contributed to the sociological and criminalistic literature of Italy a series of highly interesting monographs on conditions in their

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own special districts. The school has still other effects on the students. It brings in close touch for four months Italians from the high valleys of the Alps and from Sicily; absolutely different types, with very different standards. In daily contact they exchange their views and learn about certain regional particularities, which are extremely valuable from the point of view of a man who is to prevent and repress crime. The personal friendship established during the course facilitates their work later on. Instead of getting through a lot of red tape they might write a friendly informal letter, if they are in need of information. Masonry exists not only among thieves, but everywhere else among groups of people who are interested in the same work. The relations between Professor Ottolenghi and the students were quite unique. He commands their respect; he has infused in them an immense interest in the science he represents and they would do anything for him. They are exceedingly proud that an authority of international fame is their teacher. The reforming influence of the school on the Italian police is already noticeable. The progress is, the world over, undoubtedly along the lines of the Italian method, which enables commanding officers by the particular instruction, which they receive in Rome, to do more efficient, preventive work. Prevention is far cheaper to society and far more ethical and moral than repression.