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## New Mode of Identifying Criminals, A

John H. Wigmore

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## EDITORIAL

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### A NEW MODE OF IDENTIFYING CRIMINALS

The following dispatch, appearing in the New York "Times" of August 27, 1926, describes something which may never mature into practical use; but in case it should, the fact that the undersigned proposed it some five years ago may be of interest:

"Berlin, Aug. 26.—Beside every picture and set of fingerprints and handwriting in the Rogues' Gallery will be a chart with a series of curves characteristic of the rhythm of the voice if a scheme worked out by Dr. Eduard Sievers of Leipzig proves to be all he claims for it. Police authorities are now testing his apparatus for recording the harmonious measures of the human voice and it is already asserted that identification of individuals by it is almost infallible. At least it is better than the handwriting test.

"Dr. Sievers even goes so far as to say the characteristic rhythm of voice is transmitted to writing and that writers of anonymous letters can be detected by reading their compositions into a machine and noting the curves produced. He is able in every instance to distinguish between the curves produced by the voices of poets and musicians from laborers who are not appreciative of the finer arts. The method of classifying voice curves is worked out on lines similar to the Bertillon system of indexing fingerprints."

The story is this: Professor Miller, of the Case School of Applied Science (in Western Reserve University, Cleveland) wrote a book on Acoustics, and the undersigned read it, as doubtless did thousands of others. This book described a method of recording the voice of individual singers, by transmuting the sound-vibrations into light-vibrations and photographing the wave-motion on cards. By this method it could be seen that (for example) the voice of Galli-Curci and the voice of Bori, singing the same aria "Caro Nome" from "Rigoletto," were different, though the musical notes were the same; for the saw-toothed chart recording the ups and downs of vibration from the voice of the one made a very different picture from the chart of the other.

Nothing was said in the book (as I remember) about recording the ordinary voice. But shortly afterwards (in 1923) the undersigned attended a gathering of friends and heard behind him in the crowded room a voice which he immediately recognized as that of a once-intimate friend whom he had not seen for some thirty years.

This incident suggested the inference that the timbre of a person's voice does not change appreciably with the passage of years. If that were so, the record of a voice, made by Professor Miller's method, would be a reliable mode of identification.

The undersigned then wrote to Professor Miller and asked whether the same method of photo-record could be applied to the spoken voice as to the singing voice, and if so, whether it could not be used for personal identification.

The distinguished professor's reply was so discouraging that the undersigned dropped the subject, as a practical proposal, though he has often in the interim mentioned it to friends.

But now, it seems, there was something sound in the proposal, after all!

Advance, ye physicists, acousticians, and develop it! Now that Messrs. Goddard and Waite have shown us (see this number of the JOURNAL) that bullets can be identified, surely we shall not shrink at the science of identifying voices. "Forensic Ballistics"—such is the dignified name for the bullet-science. But the other science will need a name, too. What shall it be? How would *Phasigraphy* do?

JOHN H. WIGMORE