

REVIEWS

THE MOVING FINGER WRITES

FINGER PRINTS. Francis Galton. Reprint of the original 1892 edition, with a new introduction by H. Cummins. De Capo Press, New York, 1965. Pp. 216+xvi. \$6.95.

The characteristic arches, loops and whorls described by the dermal ridges on fingers and palms were studied by palmists long before the nineteenth century when they were studied for the first time by scientists. When Galton became interested in them in 1888 he found that J. E. Purkyně had classified them into nine distinctive types in 1823, and that Henry Faulds and Sir William Herschel had published accounts of their work on the subject in 1880. Galton synthesised the work of these pioneers and developed it to the point where the British Government could be convinced of the value of finger prints in the identification of criminals. For the indexing of finger prints, however, the Government relied on the anthropometric system of Alphonse Bertillon, since Galton's finger print classification was as yet inadequate; and it was not until Sir Edward Henry modified and improved Galton's classification that a completely independent system of identification by finger prints was achieved. Sir Henry's book describing this system (*Classification and Uses of Finger Prints*. 1st. ed. 1900) has gone through eight editions, but Galton's book has never been revised or reprinted, although it represents a landmark in the growth of dermatoglyphics. This, the first reprint, is therefore very welcome, the more so since it is furnished with an excellent account by Dr Harold Cummins of the history of the subject to 1900. In so brief an account Dr Cummins could not be expected to deal in any detail with the relationship of Henry's system of indexing finger prints to Galton's system. But a reference to Karl Pearson's account in *The Life, Letters and Labours of Francis Galton*, vol. 3a, pp. 150-160, would have made good this omission and done full justice to Galton's contribution.

This well-produced book is furnished with excellent reproductions of Galton's and Purkyně's illustrations of finger prints, and Galton's very readable account of 1892 includes a translation of a part of Purkyně's *Commentatio* of 1823.

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A HYPOTHETICAL THEORY?

Towards an understanding of THE MECHANISM OF INHERITANCE. H. L. K. Whitehouse. Edward Arnold, 1965. Pp. 372. 55s.

Dr Whitehouse's book is timely, original and interesting. Few readers can fail to benefit from it for it deals with the nature and development of many of the major concepts of genetics. In keeping with this theme each chapter heading incorporates one or other of the two headline terms—hypothesis or theory. But in his precise choice of term there is a curious mixture of the critical and the uncritical. If I may be forgiven for quoting