

## CHAPTER II

### THE "HUMAN" DETECTIVE

**I**N his description of the scientific departments of our Police system M. Bayle has clearly shown where science begins and ends in the detection of crime. He points to the human element which remains impervious to the microscope and crucible. This is a side of criminal investigation which operates parallel with the scientific and laboratory system and is essential in nearly all cases before the ends of justice can be served. As Prefect, I have not been actively engaged in the scientific side of criminal catching, but I have been responsible for all those other sides of investigation which go to make up the perfect case from the Police point of view.

I want to explain by representative cases exactly how we work along the lines of (1) deduction, (2) a percentage of good fortune and chance, (3) the warring emotions and passions of suspected persons—conflicting confessions and admissions, etc. M. Bayle has exhibited the scientific detective—I now want to show how the "human" detective "gets his man."

Every case of murder opens in one of the three following ways : confession by the criminal ; a statement that someone has disappeared ; the discovery of a corpse. The first case is rare—almost exceptional. The second involves a preliminary inquiry and a search for the presumed victim—there can only be an assumption of foul play, and until there are positive results it is impossible to say that murder or any other crime has taken place.

A corpse may be discovered in the house of the victim ; in some house to which it has been taken after death and where an ambush may possibly have been laid ; in some spot—perhaps a station cloak-room or even the road—to which it has been carried after the crime (in which case the Police must collect the facts about its transportation), or, finally, in a river or pond ; when it is often disfigured or incomplete, and the difficulty of identifying it makes long researches necessary.

In getting rid of the corpse a criminal uses one of five methods. The first is to carry the body far from the spot where the crime has taken place ; the second is to bury it ; the third, to throw it into water ; the fourth, to burn it ; and the fifth, to cut it into pieces and hide them in different places.

On the discovery of a corpse, several problems confront the Magistrate and doctor, who alone have the right to examine,

take evidence, or carry out investigations. It is important that the condition of places should be kept intact before the police officers arrive: no one but the Police should be allowed to enter, and those employed in inquiry must step carefully so as not to disturb any traces of footprints or blood. The Magistrate's report must include a study of the place of discovery, an examination of the corpse, a search for clues and finger-prints, the inspection of blood-stains, and any other matters that may lead to conviction.

The examination of the spot is of the utmost importance, and the Magistrate must note particularly whether doors were open or closed; the possible ways of approach—chance ways such as scaffolding, chimneys, or ventilators might have provided to help the criminal to enter—signs of breaking in, and many other details. The searcher must mentally register every item before the place is actually photographed.

The traces to be examined may be of two sorts—footprints and finger-prints. Footprints may be kept intact by covering them with planks resting on two or three cross-pieces; if found in snow, they may be protected against thaw by placing a box, on which more snow is heaped up, on top of them. Some criminals commit their crimes barefoot, to avoid making a noise or staining their boots with blood, but generally they remove their footwear and keep on their socks—in which case their footprints may be identified by the way the wool is knitted or woven. Traces of slippers or shoes give double evidence—first concerning the make of shoe, and secondly, showing the way the wearer walked. In a book treating of imprints in general and their application to "Judicial Research" (Lyons, 1889), Frecon pointed out exactly what researches should follow the discovery of footmarks. He suggested that measurements, drawings, photographs, and a plaster cast should be made. To take the cast, in snow, a fine dust of plaster is put on them before pouring a liquid mixture in the tracks. With regard to finger-prints (the Bertillon system), I need only say here that they must be looked for not only at the scene of the crime, but also, when the assassin has come some distance to commit it, a long way away from the spot.

In examining the body (after having inspected everything round about) the Magistrate must first notice its exact position and then photograph it. After which he must look for fatal wounds, to determine whether death took place instantly or not. If the corpse has not been found for some days after the crime, an effort must be made, by examining the clothes and under-

clothes, to find out the exact place and time that the murder occurred.

The investigation must then make certain researches concerning the weapon used. This may be one of the following types: a piercing weapon such as an axe or anything with a point, from a compass to a hat-pin; a cutting instrument such as a knife, razor, sword, scissors, pick, or spade; a weapon such as a hammer, bottle, log of wood, stick, "life preserver," or sand-bag, which lays out the victim without a cut; a fire-arm, or any chance thing that may have been picked up. All murders, however, do not show signs of a weapon having been used. In strangling, the assassin may simply use his own hands; a murderer can throw a body down from some high place; he may drown a victim; or lastly, poison may be the means of murder.

Every article found on the scene of the crime should be carefully examined in case it has been left behind by the criminal himself. It has happened that the discovery of a simple button picked up off the ground has sent the Police straight to the tailor whose name was on it, and his information has enabled them to arrest the murderer at once.

Such articles of evidence are placed under seals, experts are called in and witnesses heard, and it remains for the Magistrate, after the victim is identified and a charge made out, to try and find the possible criminal from statements made in giving evidence. To this end he must inquire closely into the past life of the victim, his connections, friendships, enemies—and verify all alibis. If he can identify the guilty man (or woman), the main part of the task is finished, even if the criminal has disappeared, for no known criminal, no matter what his resources, can escape for long. The Magistrate must not, however, assume the guilt of a man or woman to whom the evidence points without decisive proof. Such proof is not always forthcoming, and in some cases may be indirect and merely circumstantial. Often, again, the explanations of the accused are the pivot of the charge—as those who followed the case of Briere will realize. Briere lied first about the time of the crime which he said had taken place immediately he came home, whereas it had already been proved that it took place at least two hours later. Secondly he stated that the death of the dog Ravachol (which had really taken place several hours earlier) had happened at the same time as that of his children. Then he also said that the weapon used belonged to him—yet it had been buried by the murderer in his own rubbish-heap. Each one of these points in itself was not

sufficient proof against Brière but in the mass such evidence was overwhelming.

In order now to show the events which follow the discovery of a murder, we will depict as vividly as possible the story of a crime, and have chosen as a typical case one which opens with a declaration of a disappearance.

It was nearly six o'clock on a dark rainy evening in February. In the private office of the suburban branch of a great bank sat the manager. He seemed very uneasy, and after glancing from time to time at the clock on the mantelpiece, rang the bell nervously. An old man, one of the office porters, appeared.

"Has old Léon come back?" the manager asked.

"No, sir," was the reply.

"I cannot understand it—I feel very anxious."

"But if anything had happened to him, sir, you would have heard of it by now."

"I hope so, but the delay is particularly annoying. I wanted to leave early to-night, and here I am—tied down."

The porter was dismissed, but at seven o'clock the manager, whose uneasiness had increased, consulted his sub-manager, who had also stayed behind.

"Something must have happened to Léon, because he is usually most sober and punctual," said the latter.

"Yes, he had a long round to-day; yet it's been dark some time, and his round takes him by the Marne," returned his chief.

"If you like, I'll go over to his house," volunteered the sub-manager, and set off for the home of the missing clerk.

The manager, left alone, waited, and soon his subordinate returned accompanied by a woman in tears—the wife of the clerk. Sobbing, she said that something must surely have happened to her husband as he always came home at half-past six in the evening, and begged the manager to warn the Police. The manager went therefore to the small suburban police station, gave the Inspector his information, and asked to see the Commissaire. He was told that the latter was at dinner, but on his urging that the matter was important, the Inspector sent a note to the Commissaire, requesting his presence. When the Commissaire arrived, the manager again retailed his information, stated that he did not believe the man had absconded, gave the habits and character of his employé, and vouchsafed the opinion that some criminal assault had been made upon him. The Commissaire then asked for details that the manager was unable to furnish—he could not even remember the names and addresses of the persons on whom the cashier had to call that afternoon.

"You must make out a list of them for us as soon as possible," said the Commissaire. "We cannot begin the real inquiry without that information, but we will commence a general investigation now." He took a summary of the bank manager's statements, promised to hasten matters, and showed him out.

Once alone, he telephoned to the "Judicial Police," and after hearing his information the Chief Inspector promised to send him a police superintendent and a detective inspector. While awaiting their arrival, the Commissaire gave instructions to his own staff. Foot-policemen and cyclists were ordered to hunt given neighbourhoods, particularly along the banks of the Marne, while plain-clothes detectives were sent into the country to bring in people, especially business men, who knew the cashier, and to gather any other useful information.

At ten o'clock at night the Superintendent and the Inspector arrived at the police station and read over the banker's statement; but on learning that he had not yet sent the list of clients, said they could do nothing further that night and promised to return early the next day. Inquiries made during the night, when nearly every place was shut at that late hour, revealed nothing beyond the fact that at about a quarter to four the cashier had been seen drinking at a bar; after that all trace of him had been lost.

The next morning, at eight o'clock, the list furnished by the bank manager arrived, and the Commissaire and the Inspectors (who had already been waiting an hour) examined it attentively. The clients were thirty-five in number, and against thirty-four there were written names and addresses—only number twenty-one had a blank against it where the name and address of the client were unknown. A first examination of the list eliminated many from suspicion, well-known business men whose honour was above reproach. It would, of course, be necessary to visit these, but nothing was expected from the visits. Other clients seemed to be people of position, and their papers were put aside separately to be examined later. A last series comprised only a dozen people unknown to the Police, and about whom there was no information good or bad; but the whole list contained no one of suspicious character.

The "Brigadier-en-Chef" and the Inspector commenced inquiries at once. They visited all the clients in turn, and everywhere met with respectable people, who stated the time the cashier had called and the amount they had paid him. By noon they had visited the first twenty clients. The twenty-first on the list was the one whose name and address were missing.

The twenty-second, who lived in the Impasse Emilie, and was a perfectly honest man, stated that he had not been visited by the cashier. The next two clients also had not received their accounts. This established a point. The disappearance of the cashier had taken place after he had called on his twentieth client.

The Inspectors at once informed the Commissaire of their results; made a hasty lunch and resumed their inquiries. They first telephoned to the bank and asked whether the missing name of the twenty-first client had been discovered. The bank replied that the only information they had was that they "believed that his Christian name was Maurice." The Brigadier therefore set out to find this mysterious Maurice. Following the plan of the journey given to the cashier, he decided that the man must live between the twentieth and twenty-second on the list. These were about 600 metres apart, so the Brigadier went from door to door inquiring about "Maurice." At last there was a gleam of light. A shopkeeper answered: "Maurice? Maurice? Don't know one. But are you sure of the name? I don't know any Maurice, but I know of a man who lives close by and whose name is Nourric."

"And who is this Nourric?" the Brigadier asked with deliberate carelessness.

The man muttered something unintelligible.

"That's no answer," urged the Brigadier.

"Well, what do you want me to say? I don't know anything about him."

"Where does he live exactly?"

"Rue de la Fosse Moreau, about 300 metres from here; he is a pavior."

"Does he work?"

"Fairly regularly."

"He lives alone?"

"No, he has a wife and child; his brother-in-law, who is also a pavior, lives with them."

"Is that all you know about him?"

The shopkeeper, who was in no hurry to reply, finally mumbled: "I repeat, I don't know these people well—but they have no great reputation for paying up. I would certainly not give them any credit: they have too many creditors already."

The Brigadier left the cautious shopkeeper and went to look at the Rue de la Fosse Moreau, measuring the distance as he walked—about 450 metres. Arrived there he could see the house from a distance; it seemed little better than a tumble-down hut

standing in a garden. At the corner of the road there was an inn. The police officer entered, ordered a drink, and questioned the proprietor about the man Nourric. The innkeeper was even more uncommunicative than the shopkeeper and refused to be drawn, admitting only, while on the subject of debts, that Nourric was not rich. An old woman, close by, was more inclined to gossip: "These people," she said, "don't amount to much: they work because they must and they have debts everywhere."

The Inspector, with the intention of finding out if they were at home or not on the previous afternoon, continued his questions on the subject of work. "Well," said he, "you say they work a little?"

"A bit more regularly of late. They have worked all this week, but yesterday they did not work in the afternoon. I saw them go out to amuse themselves after lunch, and they came back a little later." She added that they were certainly at home when the cashier called. The Brigadier knew besides that the latter had left the twentieth client between half-past three and a quarter to four. He should therefore have reached the Fosse Moreau before four o'clock. He felt that he was on the right track, and decided to continue his inquiries in the district. Less than half an hour later, two neighbours confirmed the old woman's statements and added that at dusk, some time between four-thirty and five o'clock, they had seen Nourric and his brother-in-law come out of their house pushing a heavily loaded handcart with bicycle wheels fixed on and covered with sacks. Stranger still, for the first time they had passed them without greeting.

The Brigadier did not wait for more, but hurried back to the Commissaire and reported results. The Commissaire telephoned to the Judicial Police to ask if he should take immediate action. He was answered that immediate action would be premature; the body of the victim had not yet been recovered, and it was necessary not to alarm the people suspected.

Meanwhile news had come that dredging undertaken in the Marne was so far unsuccessful owing to the swift current of the river. The roads along the river were therefore searched for traces of the handcart described, and a woman affirmed that at about half-past four or a quarter to five in the afternoon on the 28th February she had seen Nourric and his brother-in-law in the Boulevard de Neuilly-sur-Marne at the corner of the Boulevard Arnot. They were pushing along a small handcart which seemed to be well loaded.

Next day, at dawn, the Brigadier continued his inquiries. It was a cold, windy day; the Marne, swollen by unusual floods, was

rushing along, its muddy waters bank high. The police officer walked slowly along the road by the river-bank. His theory was that the handcart had passed there unnoticed overnight. It was then that he saw a wine-shop overlooking the road. Without much hope of gathering information he went in and ordered a drink. There was a girl, quite young, behind the bar, and he opened a conversation with her in a commonplace way :

"The countryside is looking dismal just now, especially in the evening. You must have very few clients after nightfall."

The girl replied that despite the gloom of the district they still saw customers, and those few people who passed by were always willing to stop for a drink.

"Then if there are not many clients you can observe them more closely," went on the Inspector, and when the girl inquired what he meant, he added : "Did you see, about three days ago, at night, a handcart pushed by two men ?"

She did not answer at once, seemed to hesitate and then said : "A handcart ? Yes. Two men, who stopped rather a long time some way from the inn, came in about seven o'clock, three days ago. They were pushing along a small cart and its wheels were in such a bad state they would hardly turn. They asked if they could put it in the yard here." At this point the proprietor came in, and overhearing his daughter's last words, interrupted : "You are referring to the handcart ? Did she tell you that the two men who left it came back next morning at about nine, mended it and went away about noon ?"

The officer thanked him and asked if he knew the people. He replied that he did not, but gave a precise and detailed description which corresponded to Nourric and his brother-in-law.

On his return to the Commissariat, the Brigadier found that the Inspector who was working with him had gone to inquire into the sums of money Nourric had spent since the crime. He too had had luck. He had been able to establish that husband and wife had been absolutely at the end of their resources before the 28th February, and that they had borrowed 300 francs less than a week before the murder, but since the crime they had spent considerable sums, out of all proportion to their means, to the total of thousands of francs. They had besides changed several notes of a 1000 francs each.

The next day, a foolish move on the part of the bank manager brought about the dénouement. He had himself found the address of the twenty-first client, and he went to look for him without warning the police. He questioned the woman and she stated that the collector had called on the 28th February at about 4 p.m. ;



that she had received him in the absence of her husband and had settled the bill for 250 francs that he had presented. The Commissaire and Inspector, when they heard the bank manager's report, were somewhat disconcerted by the woman's apparent calm and did not think it wise to press the matter then. It was arranged, however, that the Brigadier should go alone next day at lunch time, and visit the Nourrics.

It was just after 12.30 p.m. next day when the Brigadier arrived at their home. He found them making a hearty meal, with bottles of wine unwrapped, but still corked, in front of them. The Brigadier, in a friendly manner, questioned the three. The woman declared that the collector had certainly called there about four o'clock, and that she had paid him 250 francs. She then offered to show the receipt, and even when the officer protested that this was not necessary, would not listen, but went upstairs and triumphantly brought down a receipt for 250 francs, duly signed by the bank. Without his questioning her, she added that she had been alone in the house at the time, as her husband had been away working with his brother-in-law. She further said that the collector, whom she had accompanied to the door, had turned to the right on going out, and must have been seen by a navvy who was working in the road at that time. These two, she said, must have spoken together, because on returning to her kitchen she thought she could still hear them. These statements were made with all the calmness of a quiet conscience, but the Inspector noticed that it was the woman only who seemed frank: the two men, despite their bold outward bearing, seemed uneasy. He thanked them for their information and withdrew.

A conference took place the same day between the Examining Magistrate, the Director of Judicial Police, and the Police Commissaire, and they decided to search the house of the presumed criminals. This was done the next day, but nothing noteworthy came to light. Their handcart was taken to be examined by experts, and the three were taken to the police station to be questioned. At once important contradictions occurred in their statements. The two men agreed in saying that they had left the house at three-thirty on the day the cashier had called; they agreed also that they had taken the handcart from a yard—but they were quite at variance as to its contents. Nourric declared that it was empty when they pushed it away from his house, while his brother-in-law swore by all the gods that it was full of tiles. They further contradicted each other over the route they had taken with the cart, and the place they had left it. They were then confronted by the witnesses who had seen them come out

of the house with the same cart between four-thirty and five o'clock, and by those who had seen them going with this cart towards the Marne ; but they persisted in maintaining that these were mistaken. They claimed to be the only persons telling the truth about the matter ; even the statements of the innkeeper and his daughter did not shake their denials.

Although the body of the cashier had not been discovered, they were arrested, protesting their innocence. At the inquiry before the Examining Magistrate, new evidence came to light, and it appeared that the Nourrics, since the crime, had paid certain arrears of debts and purchased a considerable amount of goods. Nourric stated then that he had possessed, without his wife's knowledge, a 1000 francs hidden in the lining of his coat, while his wife declared that she had paid for the goods with money she had saved up unknown to her husband. In the prison, however—where the practice of introducing detectives as prisoners in order to gain confidences from suspects is often followed—the accused made some surprising avowals to fellow-prisoners. The woman Nourric said : " It took me a week to get rid of all traces of the murder ; the only thing to fear was that the handkerchief that covered the cashier's head might be found." And Nourric added to this : " If the body were to be found, I should lose my head."

On the 13th April, the investigation took a new turn. Barge-men on the Quai de Bercy suddenly saw a large packet being carried down by the river current. They managed to hook it and draw it out. The parcel was covered with brown canvas and sewn up with copper wire such as electricians use. A man's hand protruded on the left side and the sole of a nailed shoe on the right. They put this horrible parcel on the quay, and in doing so the covering, worn away by the water, tore continuously, so that another hand, bearing a ring with a deep-set stone, appeared.

The men immediately warned the life-saving station, and a message was sent from there to the Police Commissaire. The Magistrate came at once, made arrangements to have the body removed to the Medico-Legal Institute and telephoned the Coroner, the Judicial Police, and the Photographic Service of Anthropometry. Shortly afterwards, representatives of these organisations arrived. A photograph was taken of the packet before opening ; the knots were then untied, the wire pulled out and the sacking split open. A body was seen doubled up and trussed. The legs were bent up, the right foot touching the left knee and the left foot pulled up as far as the right cheek. The two arms were bound close to the trunk. The head was covered up with some kind of cloth kept in position by one knot at the top of the skull and

another at the side of the neck. A cord similar to the outside one was twined several times round the trunk, and ended behind the thigh, while another was wound round the legs and sides. Another photograph of the bound body was taken, then the head covering was removed and examined. It was a much-washed colourless piece of stuff called "crepon" which might have been cut off a shirt or a woman's under-clothing. The body was next searched. In an inner pocket different papers, almost illegible through the action of the water, were found; but on one of these, a voting paper, the name "Desprès" could be read. Now there was no longer any doubt—the corpse of the missing cashier had been found. The examination was continued, and a red-checked handkerchief round the neck, the linen over the head, the canvas of the package and the cords and ropes were put under seal. A hearse was fetched and the corpse was taken at once to the Medico-Legal Institute for examination.

The Police then decided to search the prisoners' house again for pieces of string, cords, canvas, linen, or handkerchiefs similar to those found on the corpse. As a result, three cords absolutely identical with those found on the body were discovered—but no traces of a red handkerchief. The Brigadier remembered, however, that during the first search he had seen in a wardrobe similar handkerchiefs which now seemed to have disappeared. The Examining Magistrate therefore ordered a search to be made at the house of the prisoner's mother (Mme. Duquenne) who lived in a village in the Aisne Department. This search was carried out forty-eight hours later, and the old woman recognized the handkerchief found on the corpse as one of a dozen belonging to her son (the brother-in-law of Nourric). Five like it were found in the house. There was thus no shadow of doubt of the guilt of Nourric and his brother-in-law. They obstinately continued to deny everything, however.

The Magistrate then considered the summaries received from the head of the Judicial Identity Department. The report on the handcart was restricted to affirming traces of blood on the wood and to announcing that despite the fact that the wheels were patched up and in consequence weak, it was strong enough to bear the weight of two normal men. The report on the objects found on the corpse—a model statement—gave overwhelming evidence against the accused, and ran as follows: "I have the honour, as a preface to my report, to summarize my principal conclusions on the examination and comparison of the different objects found on the body of Desprès and of those of a similar nature taken from Nourric's home at Perreux and from the house

of the married couple Duquenne at Fargnier. The red-checked handkerchief which covered the head of the corpse corresponds exactly to those found in the house of the Duquennes at Fargnier, and we are able to state that it comes from the same piece of tissue as the others. Not only does it show the same pattern, with identical thread and dyes, but it shows the same accidental faults produced by the factory machine as the five other handkerchiefs seized at Fargnier. The cord used in tying up the body is in every way identical with one of two cords found on a tree in Nourric's garden. They seemed to be of the same make; they were both of even length, pointing to probable use in the same household; their ends were 'seized' in the same way, and were different from the second cord found; there were the same number of fibres in each; the same twist, and the same loss of length due to that twist, and lastly, the fibres (of both plant fibre and jute) were combined in the same proportions. From the fact that these fibres showed the same structural peculiarities and microscopic impurities, it may be taken as certain that these cords came out at the same time from the same factory. The five pieces of electric cable found on the body were of three sorts and had three separate origins; they were different from those found at Nourric's home at Perreux, but this in no way implies that they had not come from there."

The guilt of the prisoners seemed thus established; it only remained for the " Court of Inquiry " to place it beyond dispute, but for our purpose the case is ended. Our readers must have realized that the report is not one of fiction but of reality. The crime took place at Perreux on 28th February, 1927—the victim being the cashier Desprès, and the accused the married couple Nourric and their brother-in-law Duquenne. The inquiry was carried out by the Police Commissioner of Nogent-sur-Marne, M. Dermas, and the Brigadier-Chef, Moreux of the Judicial Police. Our report of it is based on that of M. Bayle, Head of the Department of Identification.

The case ended on the 14th March, 1928, before the Assize Courts of the Seine. Despite indisputable proofs to the contrary, the prisoners denied everything to the end. Convicted of culpable homicide with premeditation, of lying-in-wait with such intent, and of theft, Nourric was sentenced to penal servitude for life, and his wife and brother-in-law to twenty years.