

The kidnaper's curt demand for payment often becomes a boomerang leading the detectives directly back to him.

For the ransom note is an important clue in the solution of such crimes. It may be that fingerprints can be brought out by special treatment of the paper. Examination under a microscope often reveals defects of paper or watermark through which the paper can be traced to the locality where it was purchased by the extortioner. The microscope may also reveal stains or particles of dust, the nature of which may indicate something of the letter's history.

Handwriting Reveals

And even though the letter is unsigned, the expert can find clues to identity in the handwriting itself. Although Uncle Sam's handwriting experts do not rely on the idea that personality is revealed by handwriting, they do know from experience that much can be learned about the individual from this source.

Nationality is one of the facts revealed by handwriting. The German, the Austrian, and the Italian are betrayed by tiny peculiarities in the formation of letters, which would be unnoticeable to you, but which are noted immediately by the expert's keen eye and microscope.

Age is another item which can be estimated by the expert examining handwriting.

Diseases sometimes show up in handwriting, especially nervous diseases. And if the note is written on the typewriter, the extortioner is but little better off. No two typewriters produce exactly the same writing, and the expert has learned to trace machines with uncanny accuracy.

Science News Letter, January 20, 1934



WHAT X-RAYS CAN TELL US ABOUT ATOMS

an address by

Prof. S. K. Allison

of the Ryerson Physical Laboratory, University of Chicago

Wednesday, January 24, at 4:30 p. m., Eastern Standard Time, over Stations of the Columbia Broadcasting System. Each week a prominent scientist speaks over the Columbia System under the auspices of Science Service.

PSYCHOLOGY

Steadiness Tests May Pick Marksmen Before They Shoot

Likelihood of Advance Choice Indicated by Tests in Which Expert Riflemen Excel Others in Muscular Coordination

EXPERT riflemen of the University of Oregon R.O.T.C. unit greatly excelled all other students examined in a series of muscular coordination tests given at Eugene, Ore., recently, and so positive were the results that University psychologists see in the experiment a new and efficient method of selecting men for expert marksmen, it was announced by Dr. Robert H. Seashore, associate professor of psychology, and Raymond D. Adams, his assistant.

The results showed that but one person out of sixty examined equalled the record made by members of the rifle team in a series of five tests. Musicians, draftsmen and athletes, as well as a number of men selected at random, made up the group. Additional experiments carried out with the riflemen indicate that the actual training in rifle shooting itself was not the major factor in accounting for the superiority shown by team members. Intensive practice in the tests themselves, carried on over a period ten times as long as the standard time, produced an amount of improvement which would account for only one-fifth of the total range of individual difference.

The university scientists now plan, as a crucial test, to select from men wholly untrained in rifle shooting one group showing superiority in these tests and another showing average ability. Both groups will then be given the same training in marksmanship. If the selected group shows a marked superiority in actual rifle fire, it is believed that a standard test can be devised that will eliminate the costly practice methods now used to select men for training. Savings in ammunition by armies, military schools and other organizations would be tremendous.

The five tests given included the Miles ataximeter for measuring postural sway, the Beal and Hall ataxiagraph for photographing tremor movements of the arm, a steadiness test apparatus devised by the University men for measuring accuracy in thrusting and

in arm steadiness, and a fifth test that records the actual sway of the rifle in shooting position.

A common factor of steadiness, quite unexpected, was found in the tests. Most motor tests, such as those for speed, are unrelated, the scientists pointed out. The rifle team and athletes were superior to the unselected group in every test, while draftsmen and pianists were superior in all but the ataxiagraph test.

Dr. Seashore is well known in psychological research fields for his previous work on motor coordination. Testing apparatus he has devised is now widely used in psychological laboratories.

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PLANT PATHOLOGY

Virus of Plant Mosaic Concentrated in Protoplasm

EVIDENCE that the invisible, filtering virus that causes mosaic disease in tobacco is concentrated in the living protoplasm of the cells, and not in the watery contents, or cell sap, has been obtained by Prof. B. M. Duggar and Dr. L. G. Livingston of the University of Wisconsin.

They used a special apparatus with microscopically slender hollow points, to penetrate certain large hair-cells on the surface of tobacco leaves and extract various parts of their contents—an almost incredibly delicate operation. The virus seemed not only to be concentrated in the protoplasm, but to be especially strong when the cells contained special structures known as "inclusion bodies," which can often be demonstrated when the disease is present in the plants.

"It is suggested," said Prof. Duggar, "that the inclusion bodies at least accompany the development of the virus agency in high concentration. Clear demonstration was obtained that the inclusions are fragile structures, readily breaking into granules when touched with the micropipette."

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