



LABORATOIRE

de

PSYCHOLOGIE PHYSIOLOGIQUE

de la

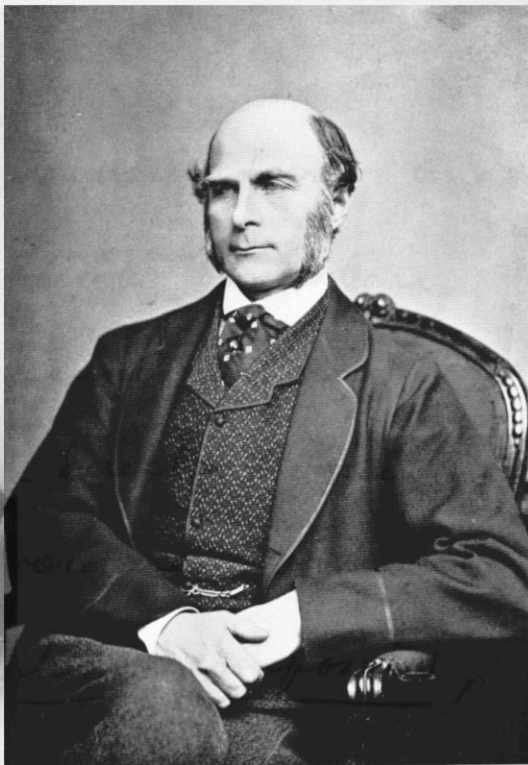
SORBONNE (la Faculté des Sciences)



*Binet* *flr*

# Francis Galton and Alfred Binet

## Correspondence



*et pourriez-vous en donner un*

*exemplaire* Edited by Gavan Tredoux

*exemplaire avait reçu avec la*

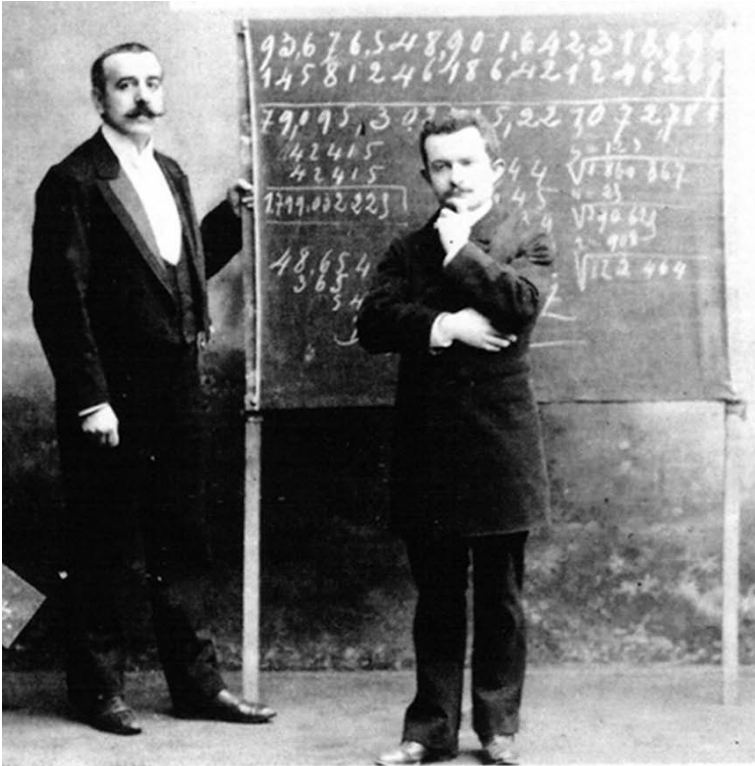
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FRANCIS GALTON AND ALFRED BINET:  
CORRESPONDENCE

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# Francis Galton & Alfred Binet

## Correspondence



Edited by Gavan Tredoux



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## Francis Galton: a Lifetime of Exploration

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

This brief volume contains previously unpublished correspondence between the polymath Sir Francis Galton (1822–1911) and the French psychologist Alfred Binet (1857–1911). Both men were pioneers in the field of mental testing.

Among his many other accomplishments, Galton devised physical reaction-time tests for intelligence—see *Francis Galton: a Lifetime of Exploration*<sup>1</sup> and <http://galton.org> for full details on Galton.

Binet first devised the paper-and-pencil intelligence tests that we are now familiar with, for use with schoolchildren. (Later these would be called ‘IQ’ tests when expressed as quotients of mental age but that was not Binet’s idea.) These tests combine items that have low individual item reliability into a composite test with high overall reliability.

The two scientists communicated from the early 1890s onward—the correspondence was initiated by Binet—sharing interests in composite photographs, calculating prodigies, mental fatigue and imagery. The letters suggest that Binet and Galton met in person at least once, but no other details are currently known. In fact Galton had been reading Binet since the mid-1880s, recommending the Frenchman’s book on

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<sup>1</sup> Tredoux 2023a,b.

*The Psychology of Reasoning* to Max Müller while exchanging notes with the philologist about ‘Thoughts without Words’.<sup>2</sup> Müller ordered it.

Galton reviewed Binet’s 1894 book on the *Psychology of mental arithmeticians and blindfold chess players* for *Nature*.<sup>3</sup> On Binet’s recommendation, one of the most famous of these calculating prodigies, the Piedmontese Jacques (Giacomo) Inaudi (1867–1950), was presented to Galton for detailed examination when the boy toured England the previous year.<sup>4</sup>

In 1886 Galton had visited an ‘Asylum for Idiots’ at Earlswood, where he had toured a few years earlier with George Romanes, and another at Darenth, near Dartford. ‘Span of prehension’ (now called digit span) tests were given to a handful of ordinary female inmates, who were asked to recall strings of random numerals in the order read to them. Predictably they did rather poorly, though better at Darenth, who were ‘merely imbecile’. But three male inmates at Earlswood had remarkable memories for historical dates, which they enjoyed memorizing from books, even though their digit span was no better than others.<sup>5</sup> These cases were unlike the otherwise-ordinary French calculating sensation Jacques Inaudi, who had been marvelling audiences since 1880, to the extent that he was formally investigated by a committee of French scientists led by Charcot in 1892.

The following year Inaudi was publicly exhibited in England. His handler bore a letter of introduction from ‘Pro-

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<sup>2</sup> Binet 1886; Galton 1887b.

<sup>3</sup> Galton 1894a.

<sup>4</sup> Tredoux 2023a.

<sup>5</sup> Galton 1887a.

fessor' Binet to Galton, and the French committee's report.<sup>6</sup> After discreetly assembling a local committee at a Royal Society *conversazione*, assuring all the strictest confidence for all, Galton received Inaudi and his handler at Rutland Gate on the morning of May 11, for a *seance*. The scientists examined the boy's mental powers and found that he had a 'prodigious memory for figures', that he could easily perform feats like calculating cube roots of 7 figure numbers in his mind, but (somewhat obtusely) that his arithmetical abilities did not exceed those of an able bank clerk once the time saved writing things down was accounted for. In his mental operations he did not seem to operate visually, relying rather on sounds, with a special dislike for the number 7. 'He had that wearied look in the eyes & brow that I have seen in other boy calculators', Galton noted. In 1894 Binet published *Psychologie des grands calculateurs et joueurs d'échecs* (Psychology of mental arithmeticians and blindfold chess-players), which covered the non-visualiser Inaudi and a Greek calculating prodigy who did visualise, Diamandi. Galton reviewed it favourably in *Nature*.<sup>7</sup>

Only Binet's letters to Galton have been traced. Galton's own letters to Binet have not been traced, and may have perished in the general destruction and dispersal of Binet's papers after his death. According to Alexandre Klein, such papers of Binet as remain have had to be reconstituted from miscellaneous sources all over Europe, and from previously unknown remains possessed by his descendants. There is now a substantial collection, the "Binet Family Fund", in the National

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<sup>6</sup> Galton's notes are wrong here, as Binet was not then a professor at any institution.

<sup>7</sup> Galton 1894a.

Library of France, containing the papers that his daughters had kept until their deaths.<sup>8</sup>

The letters reproduced here were transcribed to text from the handwritten French MSS by Odile Thomas. They were translated by the editor, who has tried to present an idiomatic translation rather than a strictly literal one. Each letter is presented in translation, with the text of the French original for comparison, and images of the MSS. Please report any errors to the editor via [galton.org](http://galton.org).

Gavan Tredoux

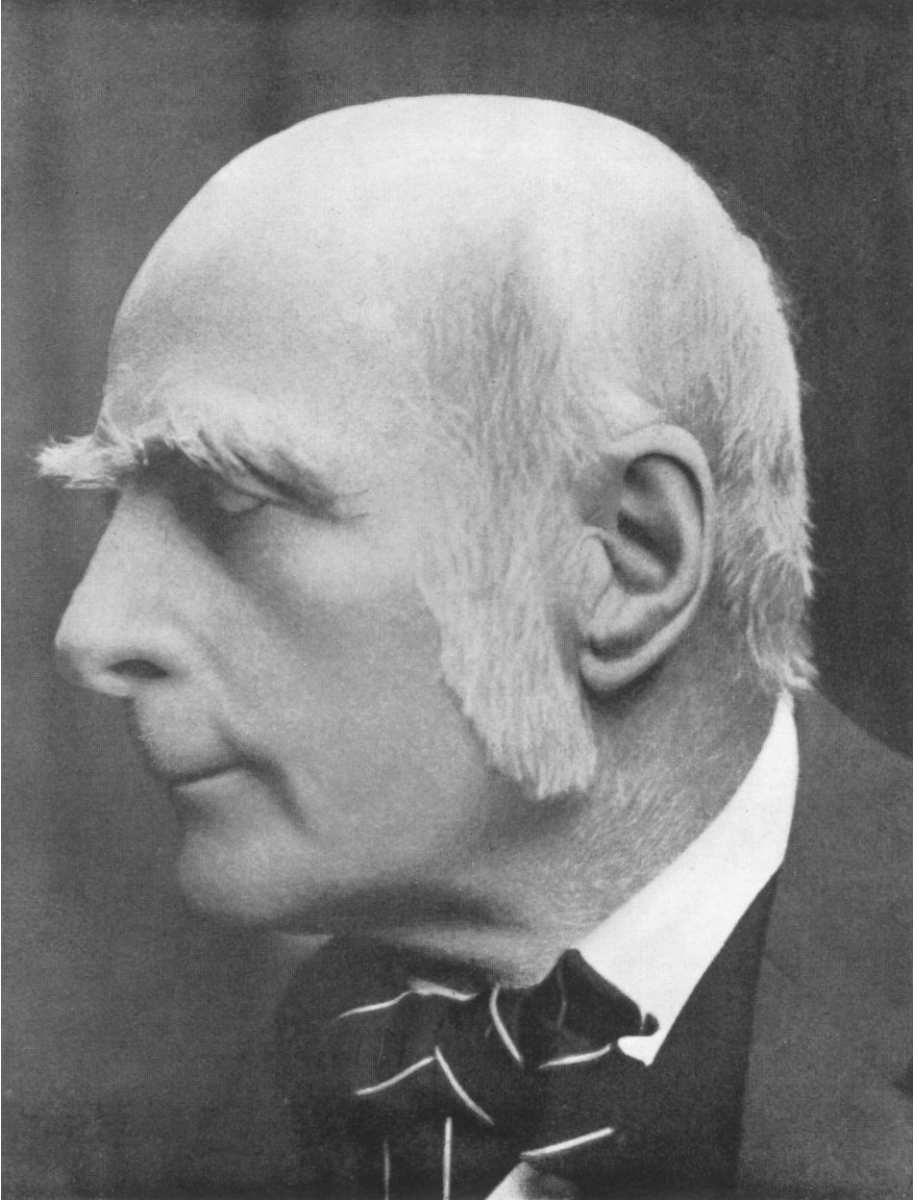
August 2022.

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<sup>8</sup> Klein 2016, 2018.



*Figure 1.1: Alfred Binet.*



*Figure 1.2: Francis Galton in the 1890s.*



*Figure 1.3: Jacques (Giacomo) Inaudi as a boy.*





## Chapter 2

# Correspondence

### 2.1 1891-11-25: Alfred Binet to Francis Galton

Physiological Psychology Laboratory, Sorbonne

Paris, 25 Nov. 91

Sir

I venture to make a request to you on behalf of the [Physiological Psychology] laboratory, the management of which M. Beaunis<sup>1</sup> was kind enough to entrust to me for the winter. Do you still have some composite photographs, and could you donate a copy to the laboratory? That copy would be received with the greatest appreciation.

Please accept, Sir, my warmest approbations and best regards.

Alfred Binet

Paris, 29 rue de Madame

---

<sup>1</sup> Henri-Étienne Beaunis (1830–1921), psychologist.

Physiological Psychology Laboratory, Sorbonne

Paris, 25 nov. 91

Monsieur

Je me permets de venir vous faire une demande dans l'intérêt du laboratoire, dont M Beaunis a bien voulu me confier la direction pendant l'hiver. Possédez-vous encore quelques photographies composites, et pourriez vous en donner un exemplaire au laboratoire? Cet exemplaire serait reçu avec la plus grande reconnaissance.

Veillez agréer, Monsieur, l'hommage de ma haute considération et de ma particulière estime.

Alfred Binet

Paris, 29 rue de Madame

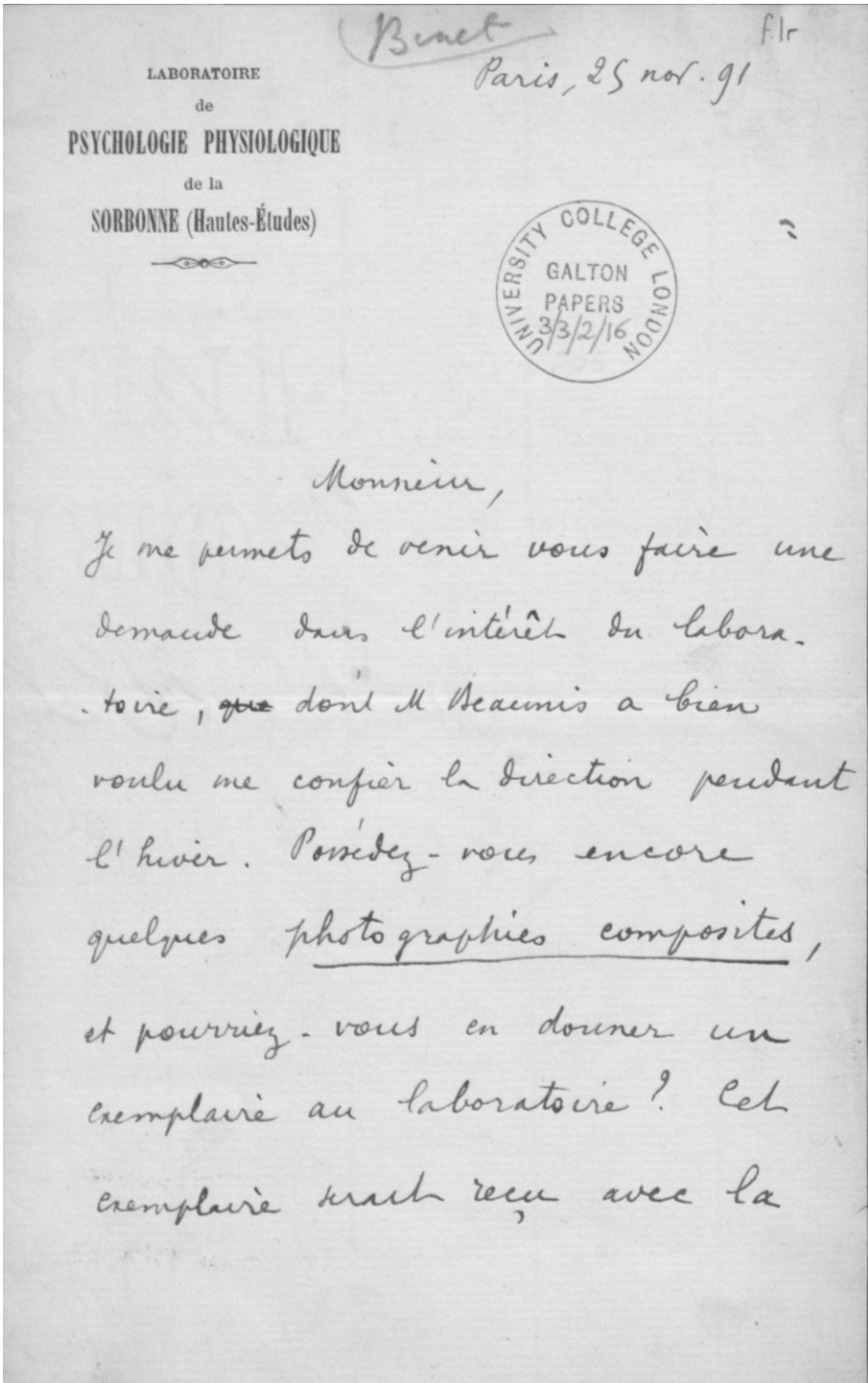


Figure 2.1: Binet to Galton 1891-11-25 Page 1

flv

plus grande reconnaissance).

Veuillez agréer, Monsieur,  
l'hommage de ma haute considé-  
-ration et de ma particulière  
estime

Alfred Binet

Paris, 29 rue de Madame

Figure 2.2: Binet to Galton 1891-11-25 Page 2

## 2.2 1892-03-19: Alfred Binet to Francis Galton

29 rue de Madame

19 March 92

Dear Sir

Thank you for the kind letter you wrote to me. I am very happy that my little volume on reasoning<sup>2</sup> meets with your approval—it would be very useful for us to keep in touch with you, our laboratory has much to gain from it, for I know that you have devised many ingenious methods of studying the sound man from the psychological point of view. Would it be too much to ask you for your photograph for our laboratory collection?

Please accept, dear Sir, the expression of my respectful and devoted feelings,

Alfred Binet

---

<sup>2</sup> Binet 1886.

29 rue de Madame

19 mars 92

Cher Monsieur

Je vous remercie de la lettre si aimable que vous m'avez écrite. Je suis bien heureux que mon petit volume sur le raisonnement ait eu votre approbation – il serait très utile pour nous de rester en relation avec vous, notre laboratoire a beaucoup à y gagner, car je sais que vous avez imaginé beaucoup de méthodes ingénieuses pour étudier l'homme sain au point de vue psychologique. Serait-il indiscret de vous demander votre photographie pour notre collection du laboratoire?

Veillez agréer, cher Monsieur, l'expression de mes sentiments respectueux et dévoués,

Alfred Binet

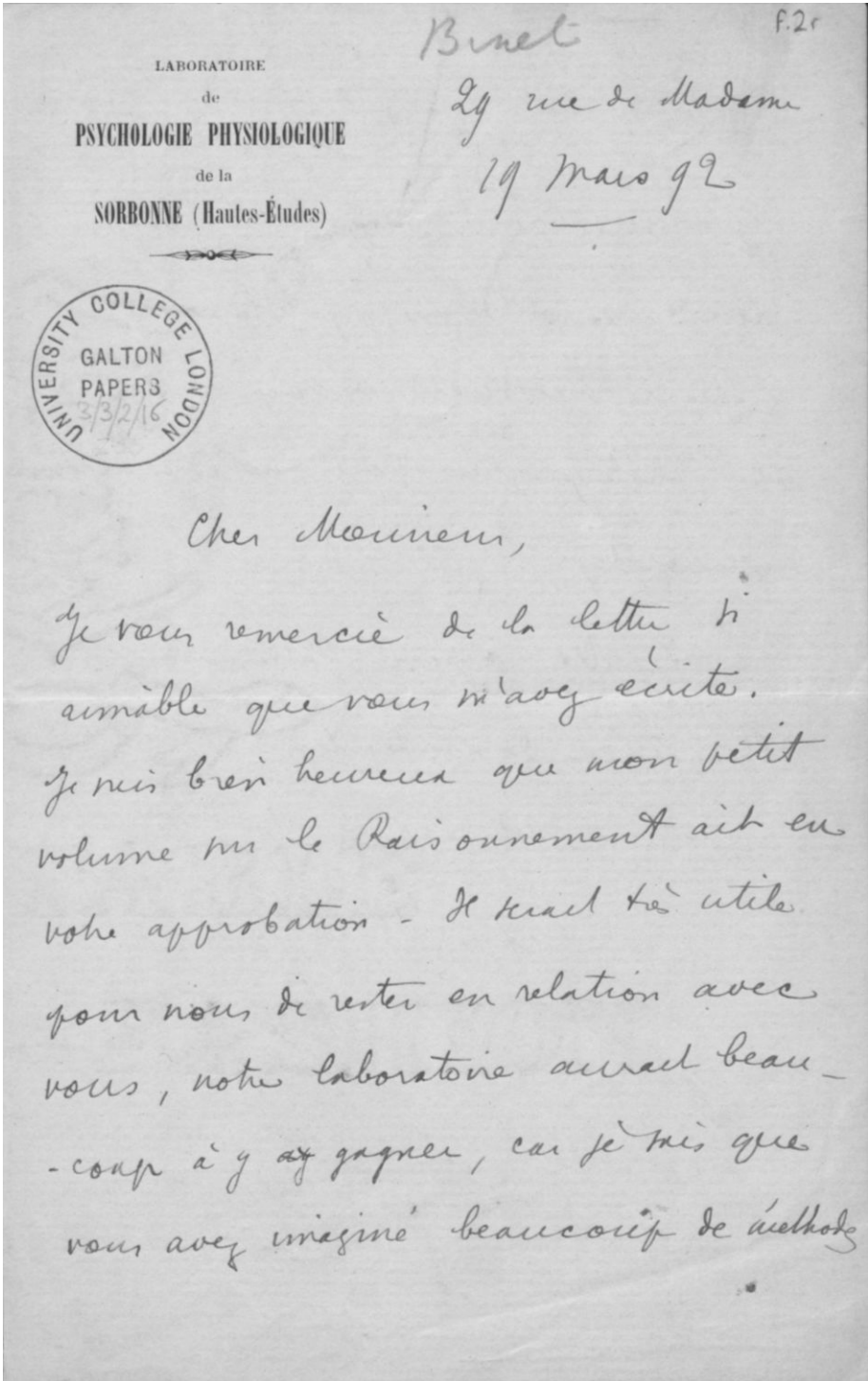


Figure 2.3: Binet to Galton 1892-03-19 Page 1

f.2v

ingénieuses pour étudier l'homme  
sain au point de vue psychologique.  
Serait-il indiscret de vous demander  
votre photographie pour notre collection  
du laboratoire?

Veillez agréer, cher Monsieur,  
l'assurance de mes sentiments  
respectueux et dévoués

Cef. Binet

Figure 2.4: Binet to Galton 1892-03-19 Page 2



## 2.3 1893-02-10: Alfred Binet to Francis Galton

Paris, 29 rue Madame  
10 February 1893

Dear Sir

I venture to ask you if it would not be possible for you to point me to the precise list of your articles where you have dealt with the subject of Mental Tests. I believe that this question is very important, and I am currently studying it in the laboratory. You would give me great pleasure by telling me where I can find your written thoughts.

Please accept, dear Sir, my best regards,  
Alfred Binet

Paris, 29 rue Madame  
10 fevrier 1893

Cher Monsieur

Je viens vous demander s'il ne vous serait pas possible de m'indiquer exactement la liste de vos articles où vous avez traité la question des Mental Tests. Je crois que cette question est très importante, et je l'étudie en ce moment au laboratoire. Vous me feriez grand plaisir en m'indiquant par conséquent où je pourrai trouver votre pensée écrite.

Veillez agréer, cher Monsieur, mes meilleurs sentiments,  
Alfred Binet

## 2.4 1893-02-12: Alfred Binet to Francis Galton

Paris, 29 rue de Madame  
February 12, 1893

Dear Sir

I hasten to reply to your kind letter. Don't send me your article on mental fatigue,<sup>3</sup> I have it—Féré's address is:<sup>4</sup>

37 Boulevard Saint-Michel  
Paris

I am going to read with great pleasure the articles that you point me to in *Nature*.<sup>5</sup>

Please accept, dear Sir, the expression of my very devoted feelings,  
Alfred Binet

---

<sup>3</sup> Galton 1888.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Samson Féré (1852–1907) who had like Binet been an assistant to the neurologist Dr. Jean-Martin Charcot (1825–1893). He was then chief medical officer at the Hospice Bicêtre. Galton wrote to Féré, who replied promptly on 1893-02-16, see GALTON/3/3/6/4.

<sup>5</sup> It is not clear which articles Binet was referring to.

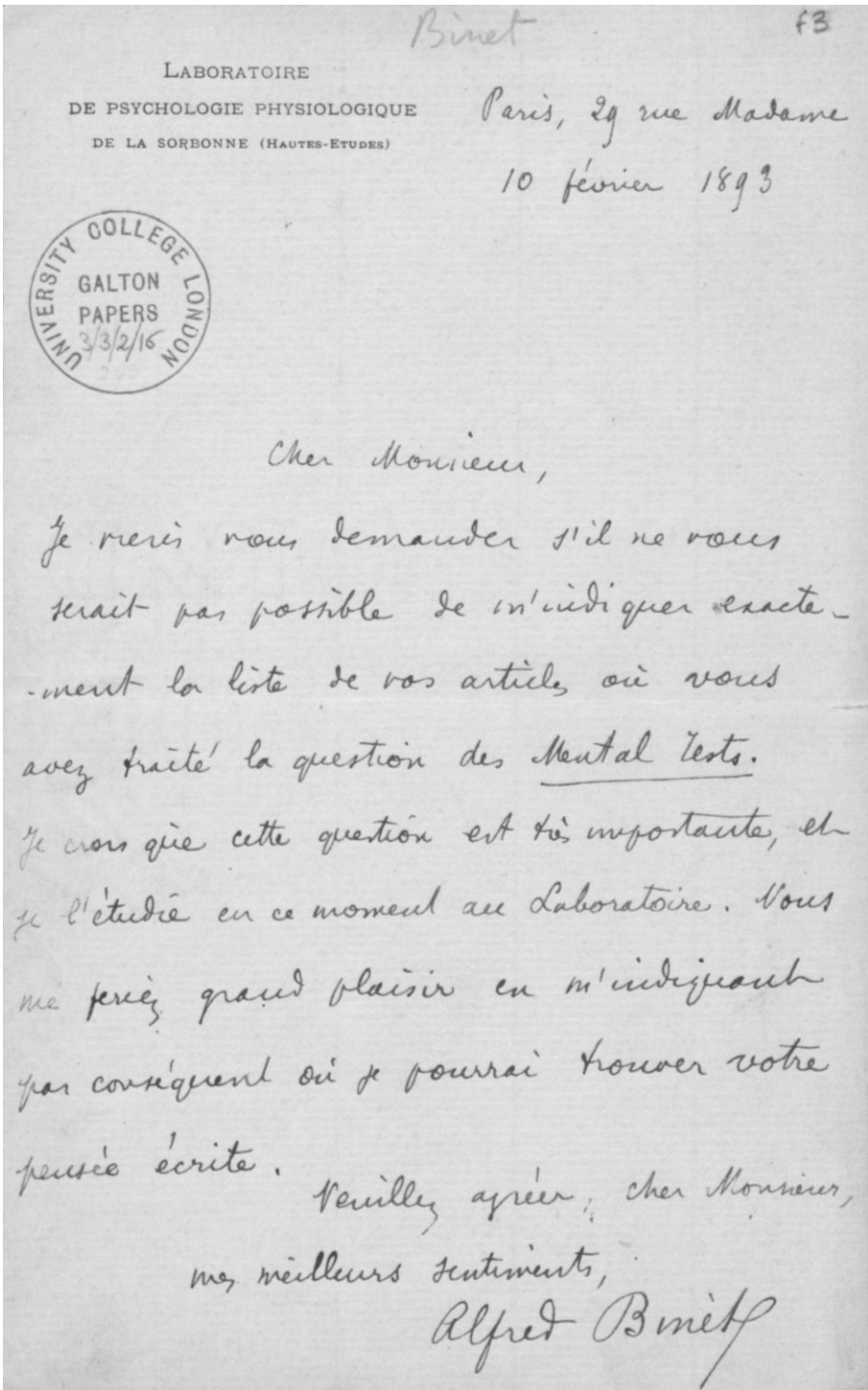


Figure 2.5: Binet to Galton 1893-02-10

Paris, 29 rue de Madame  
12 fevrier 1893

Cher Monsieur

Je me hâte de répondre à votre aimable lettre. Ne m'envoyez pas votre article sur la fatigue mentale, je l'ai – l'adresse de Féré est:

37 Boulevard St Michel  
Paris

Je vais lire avec grand joi les articles que vous m'indiquez dans Nature.

Veillez recevoir, cher Monsieur, l'expression de mes sentiments bien dévoués,

Alfred Binet

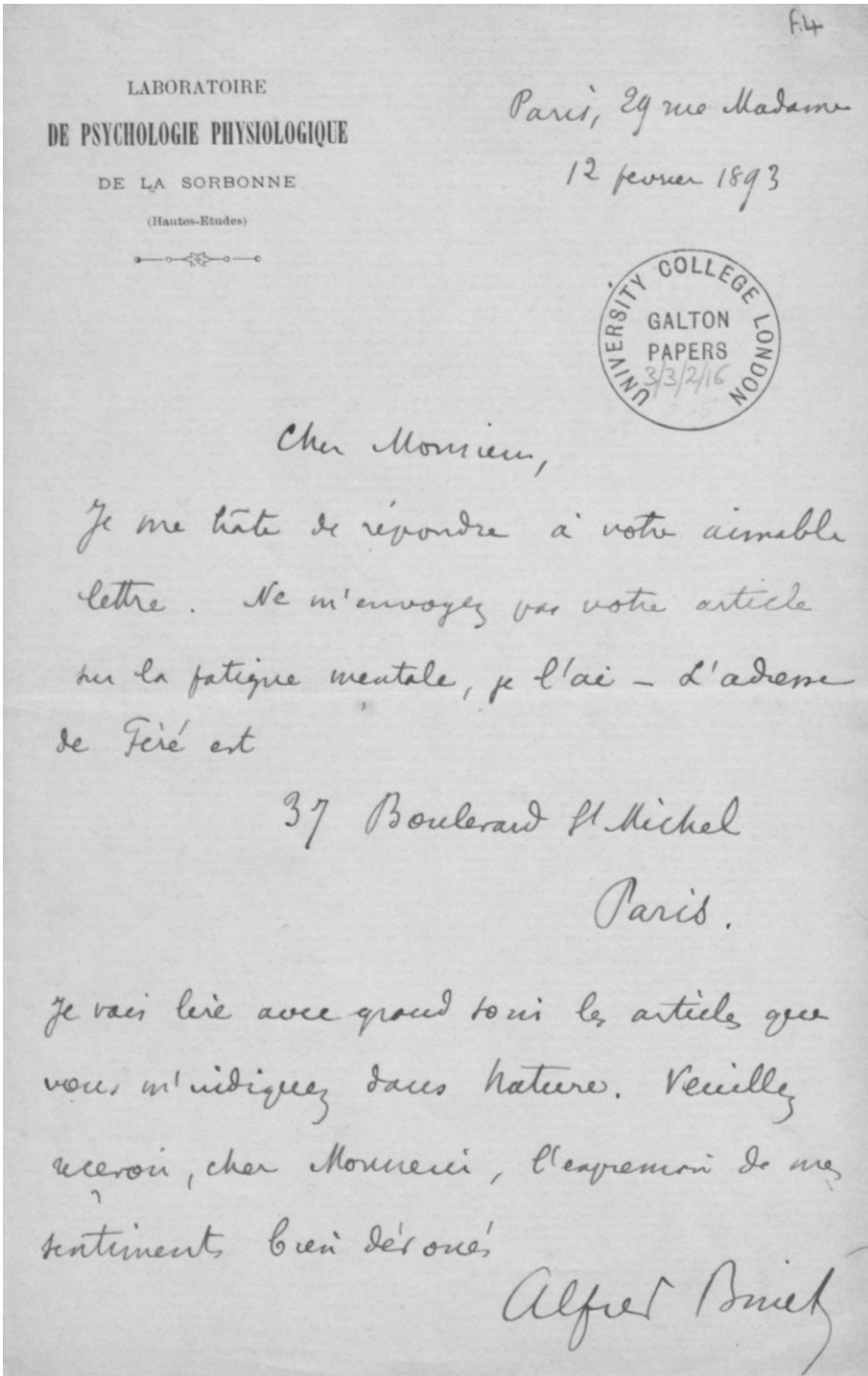


Figure 2.6: Binet to Galton 1893-02-12

## 2.5 1893-04-20: Alfred Binet to Francis Galton

Paris, 29 rue Madame  
April 20, 1893

Dear Sir

I recommend to your scientific curiosity, as well as to all your good will, Mr. Jacques Inaudi, a young calculating prodigy, on whom I published a study about a year ago. M. Jacques Inaudi, who is indeed of the family of Mondeux, Bidder and Colburn,<sup>6</sup> shows a novel psychological character; in his operations of mental calculation, he does not see the figures, he hears them and pronounces them. I have no doubt that this question interests you, you who have done everything for the study of mental imagery.

Please accept, dear Sir,—with my thanks for the sending of your interesting brochure,—the expression of my best regards,

Alfred Binet

---

<sup>6</sup> Henry Mondeaux (1826–1861), George Parker Bidder (1806–1878) and Zerah Colburn (1804–1839) were calculating prodigies. By ‘family’ Binet means type.

Paris, 29 rue Madame  
20 avril 1893

Cher Monsieur

Je recommande à votre curiosité scientifique, ainsi qu'à toute votre bienveillance, M. Jacques Inaudi, un jeune calculateur prodige, sur lequel j'ai publié une étude il y a environ un an. M. Jacques Inaudi, qui est bien de la famille de Mondeux, des Bidder et des Colburn, présente un caractère psychologique original; dans ses opérations de calcul mental, il ne voit pas les chiffres, il les entend et les prononce. Je ne doute pas que cette question vous intéresse, vous qui avez tout fait pour l'étude des images mentales.

Veillez agréer, cher Monsieur, – avec mes remerciements pour l'envoi de votre intéressante brochure, – l'expression de mes sentiments les plus distingués,

Alfred Binet



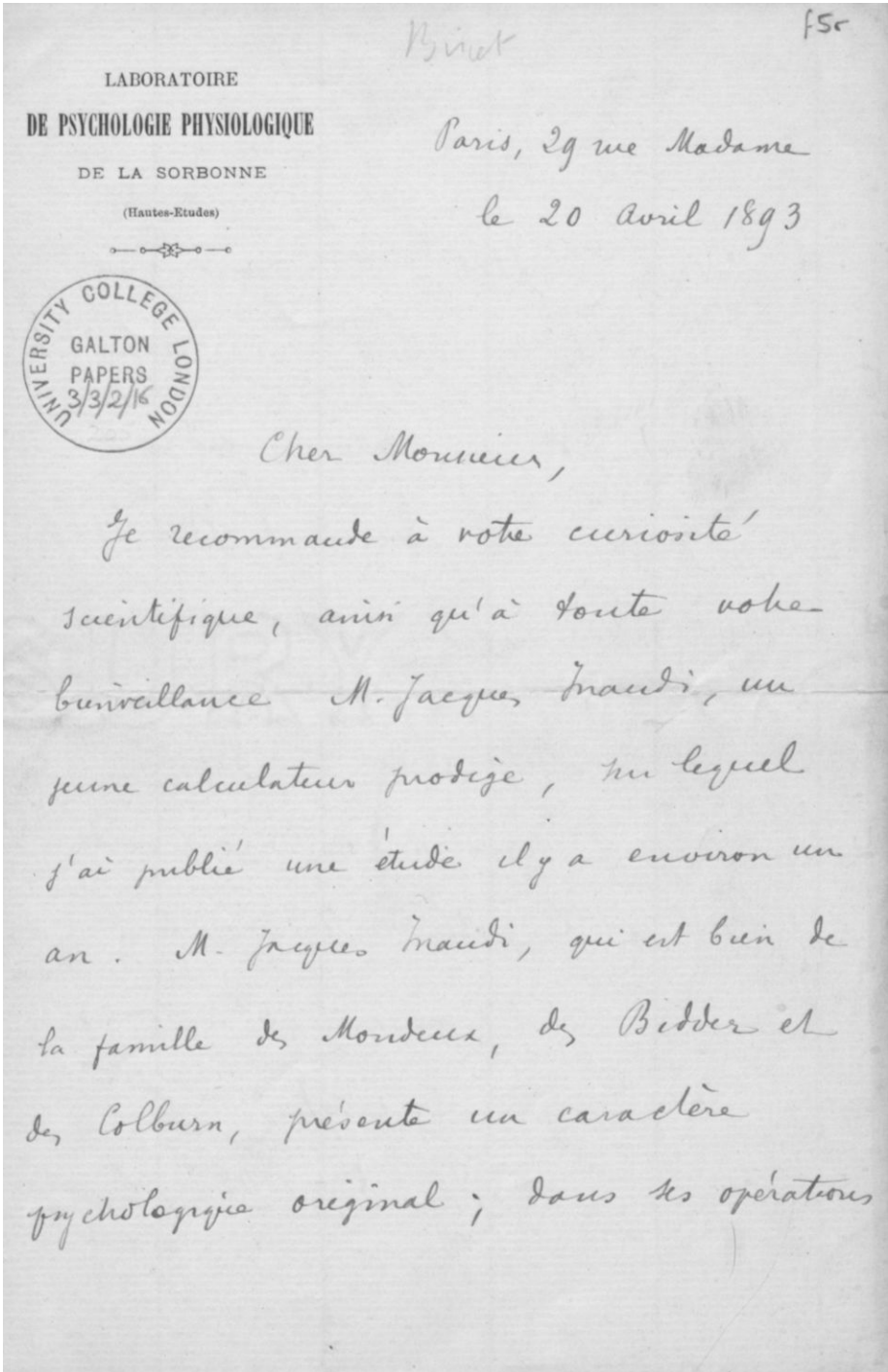


Figure 2.7: Binet to Galton 1893-04-20 Page 1

f5v

de calcul mental, il ne voit pas  
les chiffres, il les entend et les prononce.  
Je ne doute pas que cette question vous  
intéresse, vous qui avez tant fait pour  
l'étude des Images mentales.

Veuillez agréer, cher  
Monsieur, — avec mes remerciements  
pour l'envoi de votre intéressante  
brochure, — l'expression de mes  
sentiments les plus distingués

Alfred Binet

Figure 2.8: Binet to Galton 1893-04-20 Page 2

## 2.6 1893-05-22: Alfred Binet to Francis Galton

Paris, 29 rue Madame  
22 May 1893

Dear Sir

I was a little late in replying to your two kind letters, because I have been very busy lately—I am very happy to see that the study of M. Jacques Inaudi has greatly interested you.

M. Charcot and I have just recently studied a calculator of the visual type, M. Diamandi,<sup>7</sup> and I will be happy to send you our study, which will appear in five or six days.

I also intend to send you our studies on the electric pen, which is somewhat similar, it seems to me, to things that you have published lately.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, I am currently correcting, for the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, an article on the memory of chess players in which I was able to confirm in the most unexpected way one of the observations you made in your investigation of “Mental Images”. I’m not telling you anything about it yet, to leave you in suspense.<sup>9</sup>

Please accept, dear Sir, my best regards,  
Alfred Binet

---

<sup>7</sup> Jean-Martin Charcot (see above); Périclès Diamandi (1868–?) a calculating prodigy born at Pylaros in Greece.

<sup>8</sup> Edison’s Electric Pen.

<sup>9</sup> Binet 1893.

Paris, 29 rue Madame  
22 mai 1893

Cher Monsieur

J'ai un peu tardé à répondre à vos deux aimables lettres, parce que j'ai été très occupé dans ces derniers temps – je suis très heureux de voir que l'étude de M Jacques Inaudi vous a vivement intéressé.

Nous venons d'étudier récemment, M Charcot et moi, un calculateur du type visuel, M Diamandi, et je me ferai un plaisir de vous envoyer notre étude, qui va paraître dans cinq ou six jours.

Je compte aussi vous envoyer nos études sur la plume électrique, qui ressemblent un peu, à ce qu'il me semble, à des choses que vous avez fait paraître dernièrement –

Enfin, je corrige en ce moment, pour la Revue des Deux Mondes, un article sur la mémoire des joueurs d'échecs dans lequel j'ai pu confirmer de la manière la plus inattendue une des observations que vous avez faite dans votre enquête sur "Mental Imaging". Je ne vous en dis rien encore, pour vous laisser la surprise.

Veillez agréer, cher Monsieur, mes meilleurs sentiments,  
Alfred Binet

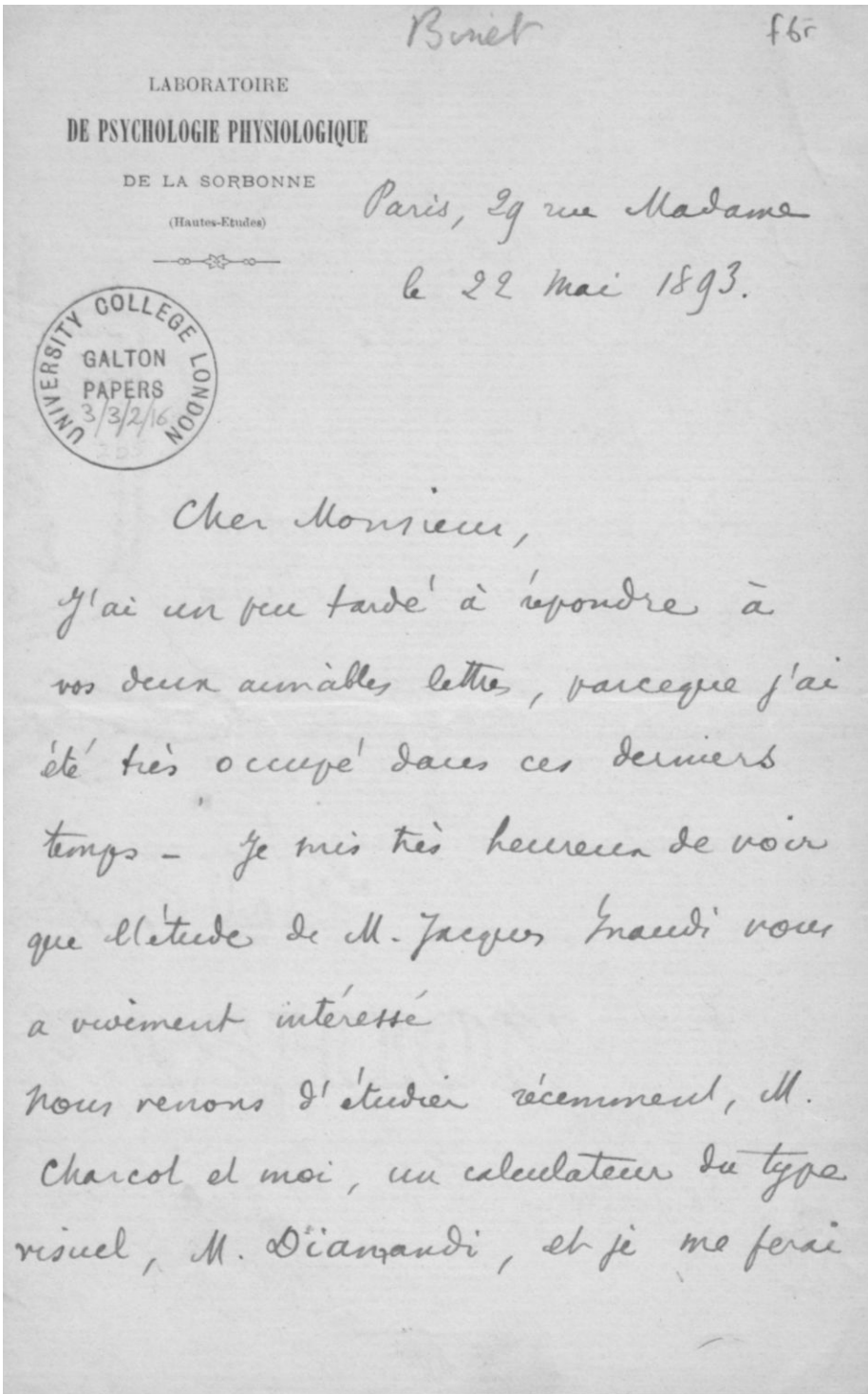


Figure 2.9: Binet to Galton 1893-05-22 Page 1

f.6v

un plaisir de vous envoyer notre  
étude, qui va paraître dans cinq  
ou six jours.

Je compte aussi vous envoyer nos  
études sur la plume électrique, qui  
ressemblent un peu, à ce qu'il me  
semble, à des choses que j'ai vues  
fait paraître dernièrement —

Enfin, je corrige en ce moment, pour  
la Revue des Deux Mondes, un article  
sur la mémoire de joueurs d'échecs  
dans lequel j'ai pu confirmer de

Figure 2.10: Binet to Galton 1893-05-22 Page 2

f7

la manière la plus inattendue une  
des observations que vous avez faite  
dans votre Enquête sur « Mental  
Imagery. » Je ne vous en dis rien  
encore, pour vous laisser la surprise.

Veuillez agréer, cher  
Monsieur, mes meilleurs sentiments

Alfred Binet

Figure 2.11: Binet to Galton 1893-05-22 Page 3

## 2.7 1894-08-22: Alfred Binet to Francis Galton

Paris, 29 rue Madame  
22 August 94

Dear Sir

We are to publish from next year a Psychological Annual summarizing all the works of experimental psychology published in 1894.<sup>10</sup> We would like to devote a small bibliographic notice of 3 to 5 pages to Mr. Romanes, recently deceased, and we ask if you can write this notice.<sup>11</sup> We would be happy to have a contribution from your pen in our Annual.<sup>12</sup>

Please accept, dear Sir, my most best regards,  
Alfred Binet

---

<sup>10</sup> *L'Année Psychologique*, founded by Binet in 1895.

<sup>11</sup> George John Romanes (1848–1894), a Scottish biologist born in Canada but raised and schooled in Scotland from the age of a few months, then at Cambridge. Galton and Charles Darwin corresponded extensively with him.

<sup>12</sup> Galton does not appear to have written any such ‘notice’.



Paris, 29 rue Madame

22 aout 94

Cher Monsieur

Nous devons publier à partir de l'année prochaine une Année Psychologique résumant tous les travaux de psychologie expérimentale parus en 1894. Nous désirons consacrer une petite notice bibliographique de 3 à 5 pages à M Romanes, récemment décédé, et nous vous demandons si vous voudriez bien vous charger de cette notice. Nous serions heureux d'avoir dans notre Année une contribution de votre plume.

Veillez agréer, cher Monsieur, mes sentiments les plus distingués,  
Alfred Binet

F.8r  
Paris, 29 rue Madame  
22 août 94

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON  
GALTON PAPERS  
3/3/2/16

Cher Monsieur,

Nous serons publier à partir  
de l'année prochaine une  
Année psychologique réunissant  
tous les travaux de psychologie  
expérimentale parus en 1894.  
Nous désirons consacrer une petite  
notice bibliographique de 3 à 5  
pages à M. Romanes, récemment  
décédé, et nous vous demandons

Figure 2.12: Binet to Galton 1893-08-22 Page 1

f 8 v

si vous voudriez bien vous  
charger de cette notice. Nous  
sommes heureux d'avoir dans notre  
Année une contribution de votre  
plume.

Veuillez agréer, cher Monsieur,  
mes sentiments les plus distingués

Alfred Binet

Figure 2.13: Binet to Galton 1893-08-22 Page 2

## 2.8 1894-10-11: Alfred Binet to Francis Galton

Postcard:

Mister Fr. Galton

42 Rutland Gate

London

England

[11 Oct 1894]

Dear Sir

Would you be kind enough to send me a reprint of your work which appeared in Nature on “Relative Sensitivity of Men and Women”,<sup>13</sup> so that I can analyze it in our *Psychological Annual*?

yours faithfully

A. Binet

29 rue Madame, Paris

---

<sup>13</sup> Galton 1894b.

Carte postale:

Monsieur Fr Galton

42 Rutland Gate

Londres

Angleterre

[11 oct 1894]

Cher Monsieur

Seriez-vous assez aimable pour m'envoyer un tirage à part de votre travail paru dans Nature sur "Relative Sensitivity of Men and Women", afin que je puisse l'analyser dans notre Année Psychologique?

Votre bien dévoué

A. Binet

29 rue Madame, Paris



Figure 2.14: Binet to Galton 1894-10-11 Recto

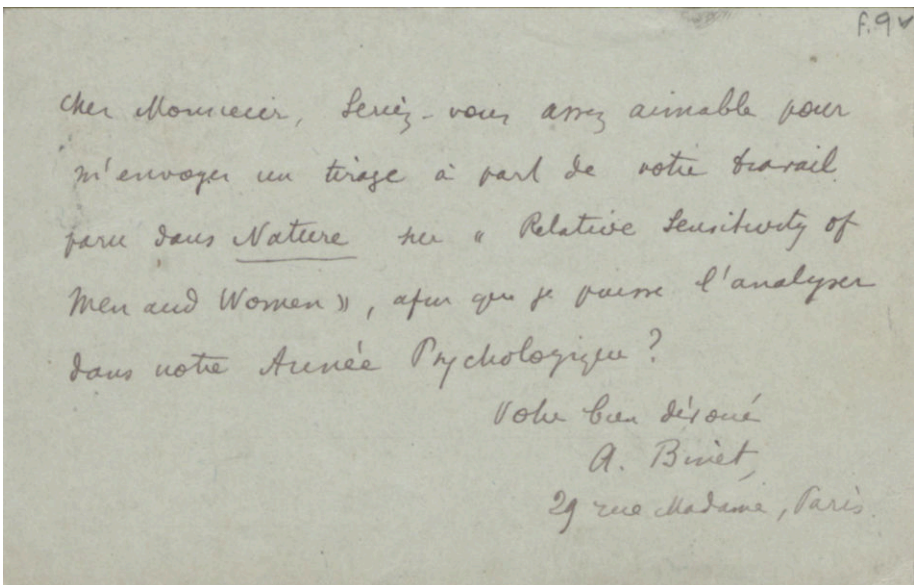


Figure 2.15: Binet to Galton 1894-10-11 Verso

## 2.9 1894-11-24: Alfred Binet to Francis Galton

Postcard:

Mister Fr. Galton

42 Rutland gate

London

Dear Sir

I have just received from you Nature and I am very happy to read the very kind—too kind—analysis that you present of my latest book.<sup>14</sup> Many thanks. How I regret not seeing you more often! We have just finished researching the recall of ideas which will certainly interest you.

yours faithfully

Alfred Binet

29 rue Madame

24 Nov. 1894

---

<sup>14</sup> Galton 1894a.

Carte postale:

Monsieur Fr Galton

42 Rutland gate

London

Cher Monsieur

Je reçois à l'instant de votre part Nature et je suis très heureux de lire la si aimable – la trop aimable – analyse que vous présentez de mon dernier livre. Mille remerciements. Comme je regrette de ne pas vous voir plus souvent! Nous venons de terminer des recherches sur la mémoire des idées qui certainement vous intéressent.

Votre bien dévoué

Alfred Binet

29 rue Madame

24 nov. 1894





Figure 2.16: Binet to Galton 1894-11-24 Recto

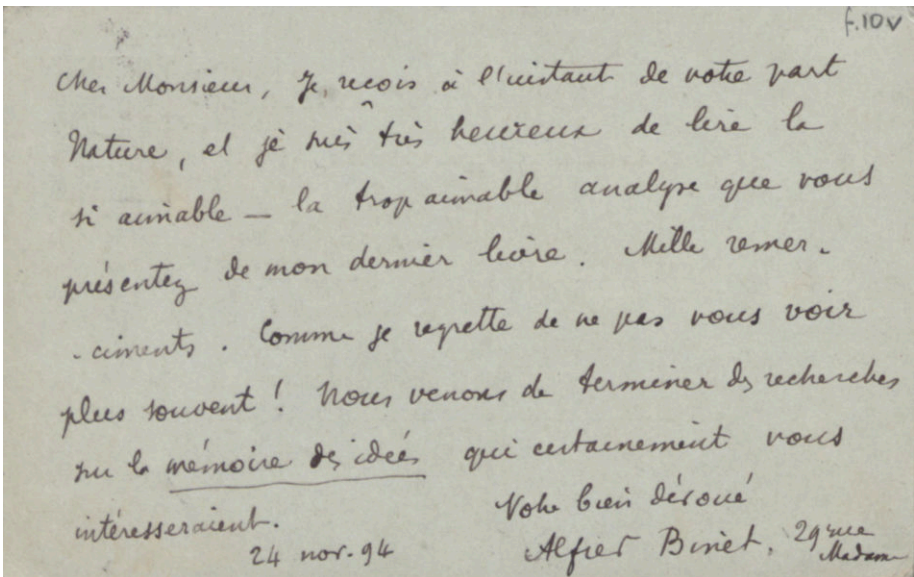


Figure 2.17: Binet to Galton 1894-11-24 Verso



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