

interests of the public health, and incidentally he deprecated the lodging of hop-pickers in old pigstyes or bullock-sheds. This objection seems to have excited some astonishment, the Ticehurst Bumbles being apparently of opinion that pigstyes are the most fitting abodes for this class of workers. More than one speaker asserted that it was impossible to get such people to be clean, and a worthy named Mannington pleasantly remarked that "they could not alter the nature of the beasts." No doubt many of the hop-pickers from the London slums are filthy in their habits, but they are not all of them tarred with the same brush, and even if they were this would not absolve the rural sanitary authorities from the duty of seeing that due regard is paid to the requirements of public health and decency in the accommodation that is provided for them. People who are compelled to live in styes are pretty certain to behave more or less like pigs, and, instead of sneering about "the nature of the beasts," Rural Councillors would do better, as the medical officer suggested, to try the effect upon them of a more suitable environment for human beings.

During a discussion at the meeting of the Alnwick Guardians last week, when it was resolved to construct cells for the incarceration of the vagrants seeking the shelter of the casual ward, it was claimed that this method of treatment would deter many from visiting the workhouse. The discussion is typical of the attitude of present-day Bumbledom towards this question of the relief of the homeless and wandering poor. No doubt a considerable proportion of the tramps occupying the casual wards every night are incorrigible loafers, undeserving of any sympathy, but they also include a number of bonâ-fide working men in search of employment, and at present practically no attempt is made to discriminate between the two classes.

The fact is that, in his determination not to pamper the professional vagrant, Bumble now unduly oppresses others who are entitled to consideration. All receive the same meagre accommodation and starvation diet, and all are called upon to perform the same severe task of stonebreaking, or other heavy labour. If anybody is incredulous of the inhumanity which marks this branch of poor law administration, let him read the facts set forth in the last annual report of the Prison Commissioners. It is there shown that large numbers of the vagrants prosecuted by the workhouse officials, and committed to goal by the magistrates, are physically unfit to undertake the tasks of stonebreaking, and so forth, for the non-fulfilment of which they are so rigorously punished. It is high time the Local Government Board overhauled the whole system of casual ward management. The treatment is already sufficiently severe for any class of tramps—the very worst, by the way, rarely enter a workhouse—and a good deal too severe for numbers of men who are driven by misfortune to submit to it.

It has been explained on behalf of Scotland-yard that the recent breakdown of the system of identification by finger prints at the Guildhall police-court was the fault, not of the system itself, but of a clerk, who made a mistake in a reference number and thus identified the prisoner with the wrong man. Considering how much confidence is now placed in the system, it is satisfactory to have this explanation. But it is not as completely reassuring as the authorities seem to suppose, if it is possible for a mere clerical error of this kind to upset the whole system and credit any prisoner on trial with the fingers of any other celebrity in the Scotland-yard collection. The next thing needed seems to be some automatic method of detecting the mistakes of clerks.

I have received a letter on this question from Mr. Francis Galton, with whose name the use of the finger-print system is identified in England. After referring to the facts in the Guildhall case and the official explanation, he says:—

I wish to point out the moral of this. In every system there must be some clerk-work, and a consequent liability, however small, to clerical blunders. In the system by measurements at least five have to be made and recorded for each person, and they each require three figures to express them. The frequent occurrence of mistakes in this complicated process was the main motive for abolishing measurements altogether, first in India and now in this country. In the finger-print system all the above clerk-work is done away with, because the hand of the accused person prints its own impression. As regards the comparative trustworthiness of the two systems, there can be no reasonable doubt. I took, as you may be aware, great pains in testing them, with the result that it is inconceivable to me that an expert to whom the impressions have been submitted of two different persons, taken with the clearness that is habitual in prisons, should ever mistake one set for the other.

I am not sure whether I appreciate the moral that Mr. Galton wishes to point, but I take it to be that, as clerical mistakes are inevitable, the system which requires the least incidental clerical work is, *ceteris paribus*, the best. If I understand the facts aright, the prints of the prisoner at Guildhall were taken by the police and forwarded to Scotland Yard for identification. They were, readily and rightly, identified with those of a man whose record was known to the police. The finger-print method was therefore not at fault at all. But when it came to turning up the record attached to the impression, a mistake in the reference number was made and the wrong *dossier* produced. The question is, would the prisoner have been convicted if he had not been able to show at once that the *dossier* was not his? It rather looks as if he might have been. But he could not have been, according to what was said in the course of the official explanation last week, had the two sets of impressions been produced to the magistrate, for the difference between them is said to have been conspicuous. Further, Mr. Galton is of opinion that in no case could an expert with the two impressions before him be mistaken.

The moral, therefore, which I should draw from the incident is that the process of identification should not be left to the staff at Scotland Yard, and the result merely