interests of the public health, and incidentally he depre-
cated the lodging of hop-pickers in old pigsties 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 sug-
gested, 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 work-
house. 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, un-
deserving 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 Com-
misioneer. 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 clerical 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 clerical 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 look, as you may be aware,
great pains in testing them, with the result that it is incon-
veniable 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 Scot-
land 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 there-
fore 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 pro-
duced. 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
accepted by the police at Scotland Yard is insufficient.