

OUT AT LAST.

Neill-Reynolds Report on Meat Horrors.

The President Sends with It a Message Urging the Passage of a Drastic Inspection Law.

The Senate and House of Representatives:

I transmit herewith the report of Mr. James Bronson Reynolds and Commissioner Charles P. Neill, the special committee whom I appointed to investigate into the conditions in the stock yards of Chicago and report thereon to me. This report is of a preliminary nature. I submit it to you now because it shows the urgent need of immediate action by the congress in the direction of providing a drastic and thoroughgoing inspection by the federal government of all stock yards and packing houses and of their products, so far as the latter enter into interstate or foreign commerce. The conditions shown by even this short inspection to exist in the Chicago stock yards are revolting. It is imperatively necessary in the interest of health and of decency that they should be radically changed. Under the existing law it is wholly impossible to secure satisfactory results.

When my attention was first directed to this matter an investigation was made under the bureau of animal industry of the department of agriculture. When the preliminary statements of this investigation were brought to my attention they showed such defects in the law and such wholly unexpected conditions that I deemed it best to have a further immediate investigation by men not connected with the bureau, and accordingly appointed Messrs. Reynolds and Neill. It was impossible under the existing law that satisfactory work should be done by the bureau of animal industry. I am now, however, examining the way in which the work actually was done.

Before I had received the report of Messrs. Reynolds and Neill I had directed that labels placed upon any package of meat food products should state only that the carcass of the animal from which the meat was taken had been inspected at the time of slaughter. If inspection of meat food products at all stages of preparation is not secured by the passage of the legislation recommended I shall feel compelled to order that inspection labels and certificates on canned products shall not be used hereafter.

The report shows that the stock yards and packing houses are not kept even reasonably clean, and that the method of handling and preparing food products is uncleanly and dangerous to health. Under existing law the national government has no power to enforce inspection of the many forms of prepared meat food products that are daily going from the packing houses into interstate commerce. Owing to an inadequate appropriation the department of agriculture is not even able to place inspectors in all establishments desiring them. The present law prohibits the shipment of uninspected meat to foreign countries, but there is no provision forbidding the shipment of uninspected meats in interstate commerce, and thus the avenues of interstate commerce are left open to traffic in diseased or spoiled meats. If, as has been alleged on seemingly good authority further evils exist, such as the improper use of chemicals and dyes, the government lacks power to remedy them. A law is needed which will enable the inspectors of the general government to inspect and supervise from the hoof to the can the preparation of the meat food product. The evil seems to be much less in the sale of dressed carcasses than in the sale of canned and other prepared products.

In my judgment the expense of the inspection should be paid by a fee levied on each animal slaughtered. If this is not done, the whole purpose of the law can at any time be defeated through an insufficient appropriation; and whenever there was no particular public interest in the subject it would be not only easy but natural thus to make the appropriation insufficient. If it were not for this consideration I should favor the government paying for it.

I call special attention to the fact that this report is preliminary, and that the investigation is still unfinished. It is not yet possible to report on the alleged abuses in the use of deleterious chemical compounds in connection with canning and preserving meat products, nor on the alleged doctoring in this fashion of tainted meat and of products returned to the packers as having grown unsalable or unusable from age or from other reasons. Grave allegations are made in reference to abuses of this nature.

Let me repeat that under the present law there is practically no method of stopping these abuses if they should be discovered to exist. Legislation is needed in order to prevent the possibility of all abuses in the future. If no legislation is passed, then the excellent results accomplished by the work of this special committee will endure only so long as the memory of the committee's work is fresh, and a recrudescence of the abuses is absolutely certain.

I urge the immediate enactment into law of provisions which will enable the department of agriculture adequately to inspect the meat and meat-food products entering into interstate commerce and to supervise the methods of preparing the same, and to prescribe the sanitary conditions under which the work shall be performed. I therefore commend to

your favorable consideration and urge the enactment of substantially the provisions known as senate amendment No. 29 to the act making appropriations for the department of agriculture for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1907, as passed by the senate, this amendment being commonly known as the Beveridge amendment.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT.

The President:

As directed by you, we investigated the conditions in the principal establishments in Chicago engaged in the slaughter of cattle, sheep, and hogs and in the preparation of dressed meat and meat-food products. Two and a half weeks were spent in the investigation in Chicago, and during this time we went through the principal packing houses in the stock yards district, together with a few of the smaller ones. A day was spent by Mr. Reynolds in New York City in the investigation of several of its leading slaughterhouses. During our investigation statements of conditions and practices in the packing houses, together with affidavits and documentary evidence, were offered us from numerous sources. Most of these were rejected as being far from proving the facts alleged and as being beyond the possibility of verification by us. We have made no statement as a fact in the report here presented that was not verified by our personal examination. Certain matters which we were unable to verify while in Chicago are still under investigation.

Condition of the Yards.

Before entering the buildings we noted the condition of the yards themselves as shown in the pavement, pens, viaducts and platform. The pavement is mostly of brick, the bricks laid with deep grooves between them, which inevitably fill with manure and refuse. Such pavement can not be properly cleaned and is slimy and malodorous when wet, yielding clouds of ill-smelling dust when dry. The pens are generally uncovered except those for sheep; these latter are paved and covered. The viaducts and platforms are of wood. Calves, sheep, and hogs that have died en route are thrown out upon the platforms where cars are unloaded. On a single platform on one occasion we counted 15 dead hogs, on the next 10 dead hogs. The only excuse given for delay in removal was that so often heard—the expense.

Buildings.

Material.—The interior finish of most of the buildings is of wood; the partition walls, supports, and rafters are of wood, uncovered by plaster or cement. The flooring in some instances is of brick or cement, but usually of wood. In many of the rooms where water is used freely the floors are soaked and slimy.

Lighting.—The buildings have been constructed with little regard to either light or ventilation. The workrooms, as a rule, are very poorly lighted. A few rooms at the top of the buildings are well lighted because they can not escape the light, but most of the rooms are so dark as to make artificial light necessary at all times. Many inside rooms where food is prepared are without windows, deprived of sunlight and without direct communication with the outside air. They may be best described as vaults in which the air rarely changes. Other rooms which open to the outer air are so large, the windows so clouded by dirt, and the walls and ceilings so dark and dingy that natural light only penetrates 20 or 30 feet from the windows, thus making artificial light in portions of even these outside rooms necessary. These dark and dingy rooms are naturally not kept suitably clean.

Ventilation.—Systematic ventilation of the workrooms is not found in any of the establishments we visited. In a few instances electric fans mitigate the stifling air, but usually the workers toil without relief in a humid atmosphere heavy with the odors of rotten wood, decayed meats, stinking offal, and entrails.

Equipment.—The work tables upon which the meat is handled, the floor carts on which it is carried about, and the tubs and other receptacles into which it is thrown are generally of wood. In all the places visited but a single porcelain-lined receptacle was seen. Tables covered with sheet iron, iron carts, and iron tubs are being introduced into the better establishments, but no establishment visited has as yet abandoned the extensive use of wooden tables and wooden receptacles. These wooden receptacles are frequently found water soaked, only half cleaned, and with meat scraps and grease accumulations adhering to their sides, and collecting dirt. This is largely true of meat racks and meat conveyors of every sort, which were in nearly all cases inadequately cleaned, and grease and meat scraps were found adhering to them, even after they had been washed and returned to service.

Sanitary Conveniences.—Nothing shows more strikingly the general indifference to matters of cleanliness and sanitation than do the privies for both men and women. The prevailing type is made by cutting off a section of workroom by a thin wooden partition rising to within a few feet of the ceiling. These privies usually ventilate into the workroom, though a few are found with a window opening into the outer air. Many are located in the inside corners of the work rooms, and thus have no outside opening whatever. They are furnished with a row of seats, generally without even side partitions. These rooms are sometimes used as cloakrooms by the employees. Lunch rooms constructed in the same manner, by boarding off a section of the workroom, often adjoin the privies, the odors of which add to the generally unsanitary state of the atmosphere.

Abominable as the above-named conditions are, the one that affects most directly and seriously the cleanliness of the food products is the frequent absence of any lavatory provisions in the privies. Washing sinks are either not furnished at all or are small and dirty. Neither are towels,

soap or toilet paper provided. Men and women return directly from these places to plunge their unwashed hands into the meat to be converted into such food products as sausages, dried beef and other compounds. Some of the privies are situated at a long distance from the workrooms, and men relieve themselves on the killing floors or in a corner of the workrooms. Hence, in some cases the fumes of the urine swell the sum of nauseating odors arising from the dirty blood-soaked, rotting floors, fruitful culture beds for the disease germs of men and animals.

A Model Slaughterhouse in Contrast with Those of Chicago.

In impressive contrast to the conditions that we saw in the stock yards of Chicago is an establishment that Mr. Reynolds visited in New York City. It well merits a description in those particulars in which it is vastly superior to similar concerns in Chicago. The two upper floors used for cattle pens are paved with well-laid bricks and cement, with side walls of brick, the top floor being covered to protect the cattle from the weather. The killing floor is paved with blue-stone, sloping toward well arranged drains, and has a large air shaft for special ventilation and abundant windows. The ceiling and upper side walls are of hard cement, with steel crossbeams and cement-faced steel supports. The lower side walls are covered with white porcelain brick. When the slaughtering of each day is finished, water is turned on, and in not more than fifteen minutes the room is so thoroughly cleansed that all perceptible odors and traces of the work are removed. Other rooms, such as those for cooling and storage, are of similar construction to the killing floor.

Treatment of Meats and Prepared Food Products.

Uncleanliness in handling products.—An absence of cleanliness was also found everywhere in the handling of meat being prepared for the various meat-food products. After killing, carcasses are well washed, and up to the time they reach the cooling room are handled in a fairly sanitary and cleanly manner. The parts that leave the cooling room for treatment in bulk are also handled with regard to cleanliness, but the parts that are sent from the cooling room to those departments of the packing houses in which various forms of meat products are prepared are handled with no regard whatever for cleanliness.

Meat scraps were also found being shoveled into receptacles from dirty floors where they were left to lie until again shoveled into barrels or into machines for chopping. These floors, it must be noted, were in most cases damp and soggy, in dark, ill-ventilated rooms, and the employees in utter ignorance of cleanliness or danger to health expectorated at will upon them. In a word, we saw meat shoveled from filthy wooden floors, piled on tables rarely washed, pushed from room to room in rotten box carts, in all of which processes it was in the way of gathering dirt, splinters, floor filth, and the expectoration of tuberculous and other diseased workers. Where comment was made to floor superintendents about these matters, it was always the reply that this meat would afterwards be cooked, and that this sterilization would prevent any danger from its use. Even this, it may be pointed out in passing, is not wholly true. A very considerable portion of the meat so handled is sent out as smoked products and in the form of sausages, which are prepared to be eaten without being cooked.

A particularly glaring instance of uncleanliness was found in a room where the best grade of sausage was being prepared for export. It was made from carefully selected meats, and was being prepared to be eaten uncooked. In this case the employee carted the chopped-up meat across a room in a barrow, the handles of which were filthy with grease. The meat was then thrown out upon tables and the employee climbed upon the table, handled the meat with his unwashed hands, knelt with his dirty apron and trousers in contact with the meat he was spreading out, and, after he had finished his operation, again took hold of the dirty handles of the wheelbarrow, went back for another load, and repeated this process indefinitely. Inquiry developed the fact that there was no water in this room at all, and the only method the man adopted for cleaning his hands was to rub them against his dirty apron or on his still filthier trousers.

As an extreme example of the entire disregard on the part of employees of any notion of cleanliness in handling dressed meat, we saw a hog that had just been killed, cleaned, washed, and started on its way to the cooling room fall from the sliding rail to a dirty wooden floor and slide part way into a filthy men's privy. It was picked up by two employees, placed upon a truck, carried into the cooling room and hung up with other carcasses, no effort being made to clean it.

Treatment of meat after inspection.—The radical defect in the present system of inspection is that it does not go far enough. It is confined at present by law to passing on the healthfulness of animals at the time of killing; but the meat that is used in sausage and in the various forms of canned products and other prepared meat foods goes through many processes, in all of which there is possibility of contamination through unsanitary handling, and further danger through the use of chemicals. During all these processes of preparation there is no government inspection and no assurance whatever that these meat-food products are wholesome and fit for food—despite the fact that all these products, when sent out, bear a label stating they have been passed upon by government inspectors.

As to the investigation of the alleged use of dyes, preservatives, or chemicals in the preparation of cured meats, sausages, and canned goods we are not yet prepared to report. All of these canned products bear

labels of which the following is a sample:

ABATTOIR NO.—

The contents of this package have been inspected according to the act of congress of March 3, 1891.

QUALITY GUARANTEED.

The phraseology of these labels is wholly unwarranted. The government inspectors pass only upon the healthfulness of the animal at the time of killing. They know nothing of the processes through which the meat has passed since this inspection. They do not know what else may have been placed in the cans in addition to "inspected meat." As a matter of fact, they know nothing about the "contents" of the can upon which the packers place these labels—do not even know that it contains what it purports to contain. The legend "quality guaranteed" immediately following the statement as to government inspection is wholly unjustifiable. It deceives and is plainly designed to deceive the average purchaser, who naturally infers from the label that the government guarantees the contents of the can to be what it purports to be.

In another establishment piles of sausages and dry moldy canned meats, admittedly several years old, were found, which the superintendent stated to us would be tanked and converted into grease. The disposition to be made of this was wholly optional with the superintendents or representatives of the packers, as the government does not concern itself with the disposition of meats after they have passed inspection on the killing floor. It might all be treated with chemicals, mixed with other meats, turned out in any form of meat product desired, and yet the packages or receptacles in which it was to be shipped out to the public would be marked with a label that their contents had been "government inspected." It is not alleged here that such use was to be made of this stuff. The case is pointed out as one showing the glaring opportunity for the misuse of a label bearing the name and the implied guaranty of the United States government.

Another instance of abuse in the use of the labels came to our notice. In two different establishments great stocks of old canned goods were being put through a washing process to remove the old labels. They were then subjected to sufficient heat to "harden up" the contents—to use the phrase of the room superintendent. After this, fresh labels, with the government name on them, were to be placed upon the cans, and they were to be sent out bearing all the evidence of being a freshly put up product. In one of these instances, by the admission of the superintendent, the stock thus being relabeled was over two years old. In the other case the superintendent evaded a statement of how old the goods were.

Treatment of Employees.

The lack of consideration for the health and comfort of the laborers in the Chicago stock yards seems to be a direct consequence of the system of administration that prevails. The various departments are under the direct control of superintendents who claim to use full authority in dealing with the employees and who seem to ignore all considerations except those of the account book. Under this system proper care of the products and of the health and comfort of the employees is impossible, and the consumer suffers in consequence. The unsanitary conditions in which the laborers work and the feverish pace which they are forced to maintain inevitably affect their health. Physicians state that tuberculosis is disproportionately prevalent in the stock yards, and the victims of this disease expectorate on the spongy wooden floors of the dark workrooms, from which falling scraps of meat are later shoveled up to be converted into food products.

Even the ordinary decencies of life are completely ignored. In practically all cases the doors of the toilet rooms open directly into the working rooms, the privies of men and women frequently adjoin and the entrances are sometimes no more than a foot or two apart. In other cases there are no privies for women in the rooms in which they work, and to reach the nearest it is necessary to go up or down a couple of flights of stairs. In one noticeable instance the privy for the women working in several adjoining rooms was in a room in which men chiefly were employed, and every girl going to use this had to pass by the working places of dozens of male operatives and enter the privy the door of which was not six feet from the working place of one of the men operatives. As previously noted, in the privies for men and women alike there are no partitions, but simply a long row of open seats. Rest rooms, where tired women workers might go for a short rest, were found as rare exceptions, and in some establishments women are even placed in charge of privies chiefly for the purpose, it was stated, to see that the girls did not absent themselves too long from their work under the excuse of visiting them. In some instances what was called a rest room was simply one end of the privy partitioned off by a six-foot partition from the remaining inclosure. A few girls were found using this, not only as a rest room, but as the only available place in which to sit to eat their luncheon.

Much of the work in connection with the handling of meat has to be carried on in rooms of a low temperature, but even here a callous disregard was everywhere seen for the comfort of those who worked in these rooms. Girls and women were found in rooms registering a temperature of 38 degree F. without any ventilation whatever, depending entirely upon artificial light. The floors were wet and soggy, and in some cases covered with water, so that the girls had to stand in boxes of sawdust as a protection for their feet.

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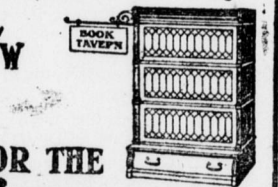
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