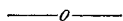


EDITORIAL ARTICLE.

THE IMPROPRIETY OF PASSING THE CARCASSES OF
ANIMALS SLAUGHTERED WHEN MORIBUND.

THE various Public Health Acts in force in this country contain provisions which relate to the inspection, seizure, and condemnation of meat which is "unsound, unwholesome, or unfit for the food of man." Wisely or unwisely, no attempt has been made in any of these enactments to define the conditions of meat or other animal products to which these adjectives may be applied, and the proceedings in our law courts have often proved that very different opinions with regard to the importance of particular diseases and abnormalities in this connection are held by different members of the medical and veterinary professions. In many of these cases in which disputes arise as to the unfitness of meat for human use the diversity of opinion expressed by the witnesses on the two sides cannot be said to be discreditable to either, since views may differ as to the facts and inferences even when all are honest and reasonably well informed. Unfortunately, however, there are other cases in which the opinion expressed by some of the witnesses can only be ascribed to a discreditable degree of ignorance or a reprehensible lack of the sense of responsibility in dealing with a question which touches human health.

At the present time this unjustifiable diversity of opinion is perhaps most frequently illustrated in prosecutions with regard to the sale of the flesh of animals that have died a natural death or been killed when already moribund. Not only the published proceedings of our law courts, but also other sources of information, from time to time bring under our notice the fact that too many veterinary surgeons hold on this matter opinions which are not creditable to their knowledge of pathology, and which when they are publicly expressed are calculated to seriously prejudice the claims of the veterinary profession to be considered the best judges as to the fitness or unfitness of meat for human food.

Quite recently a veterinary surgeon, recognising the hopeless condition of a cow he was called in to treat, advised the owner to kill the animal in order to save its carcass. The advice was followed, but, fortunately, the carcass was not saved, as the animal was the subject of anthrax and the fact was detected in the slaughter-house.

In justification of the advice which was offered to the owner of the cow in this case, it might be said that the veterinary surgeon in giving it took no actual responsibility as to the fitness of the carcass for human food, but assumed that if it should turn out to be unfit it was the duty of some other person to condemn it. In our view, however, this excuse is entirely inadmissible, for the simple reason that when an animal is already in a moribund condition from any cause its carcass, *ipso facto*, must beforehand be pronounced unfit for food. The only possible exceptions to this rule are cases of impending death from the gross mechanical injuries that come under the head of accident. It is quite possible that many veterinary surgeons who would readily assert to the view that the advice offered in the above-mentioned case was improper would nevertheless demur to the statement that the carcasses of diseased animals slaughtered because their condition is considered hopeless ought always to be condemned, and it may be admitted that in certain circumstances the public health might be safeguarded without thus in advance declaring all such carcasses to be dangerous. But these circumstances are not in existence in this country, where there is no obligation to report the fact when a dying animal is killed, and no surety that the *post-mortem* inspection will be conducted with the special care necessary to determine whether the consumption of the flesh by human beings would be devoid of danger. In this country thousands of carcasses are never inspected at all, and many more receive only the perfunctory examination which is inadequate for the detection of dangerous conditions in the absence of the internal organs and of all history as to what was the animal's state immediately prior to slaughter.

If anyone is in doubt as to the unwisdom of advising the owner of a dying animal to have it killed and dressed for the market, he would do well to make himself acquainted with the history of cases of so-called meat poisoning in this and other countries. That history is mainly a record of deadly effects wrought on human beings by the flesh of animals slaughtered during the final stage of some obscure disease. The lesson which it teaches is so obvious that the veterinary surgeon who counsels an owner to save his pocket by cutting the throat of a dying or dead animal and putting the carcass on the market must be adjudged guilty of conduct which is little short of disgraceful. On this matter the veterinary profession ought to take a firm and united stand, and consistently refuse their professional sanction to a practice fraught with so much danger to the public.
