

# A Great American Industry

Some of the Less Discussed Facts Concerning the Meat Packing Business, One of the Country's Foremost Specialties

**T**HE greatest institution of its kind in the world, and certainly the most noteworthy institution of any kind in Chicago, is the industry which has been developed by the live stock and meat packing interests. As now carried on at the Union stockyards the live stock trade and the packing business are really distinct, but they are of necessity correlated and interdependent. The Union stockyards proper consists of about 500 acres of pens, buildings and facilities for receiving, handling, feeding, watering, selling, weighing and delivering from 25,000 to 100,000 or more animals a day, this being the approximate record of actual receipts. The packing house district, familiarly known as "Packingtown," contains an almost equal territory, covered with huge brick buildings devoted to the slaughter of animals and their conversion into "raw materials" for finished commercial products.

This is the point on the American continent to which the gaze of the whole world has recently been directed by Upton Sinclair's novel, "The Jungle," and by the outcome of an investigation into the business methods of those who have profited greatly from the meat packing industry. There has been of late a public awakening to the evils of impure foods and adulterations of all kinds. The great army of food consumers has at last begun to take an active interest in what it eats and drinks. It will no longer consent to be put off with comestibles attractive in appearance, but mysterious in composition. Dainty packages and high art embellishment are no longer sufficient; serious literature and plausible statement coming from the makers of all these articles of unknown composition are received with suspicion. To put it somewhat vulgarly, "the game is up."

At present it seems to be the meat packers who have most cause to fear from this determination on the part of the American public. Their day of reckoning has long been delayed, but the most optimistic of them all cannot fail to recognize that it has come. The public understands now why Upton Sinclair's challenge to the meat packers to bring an action for libel was not accepted. It is known today that the truth of Mr. Sinclair's charges may be substantiated easily.

Forty years ago no American city had a centralized stock market of any considerable proportions. Chicago was then little more than an overgrown village, with a population of less than 100,000. The entire population of the state of Illinois was less than that of Chicago at the present time. The massing of 2,000,000 men in the field during the civil war had already demonstrated that this rapidly growing town on Lake Michigan was the most available point in the Mississippi valley region for concentrating enormous food stores for the use of the army at the front. The citizens of the ambitious town not only knew this, but were quick to grasp the opportunity to make their city the foremost live stock market of the world.

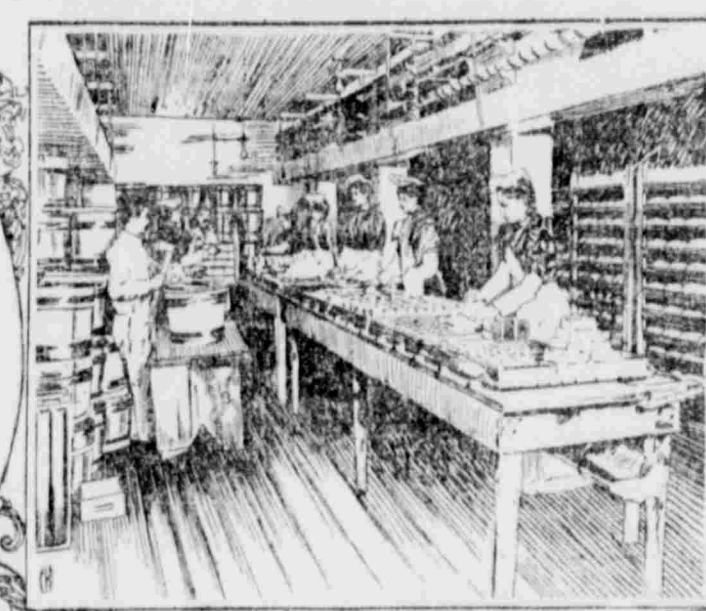
Vast and far reaching consequences have grown out of the establishment, in 1856, of the first centralized live stock market at Chicago. In a short time the railroads were aroused to the importance of the traffic and at once became active collectors for the new market. The certain prospect of constant outlet at all seasons of the year for all kinds of live stock and in any quantity at full cash value on the day of arrival was a potent allurements, and it increased the production marvelously.



KILLING LARD PAILS



UPTON SINCLAIR

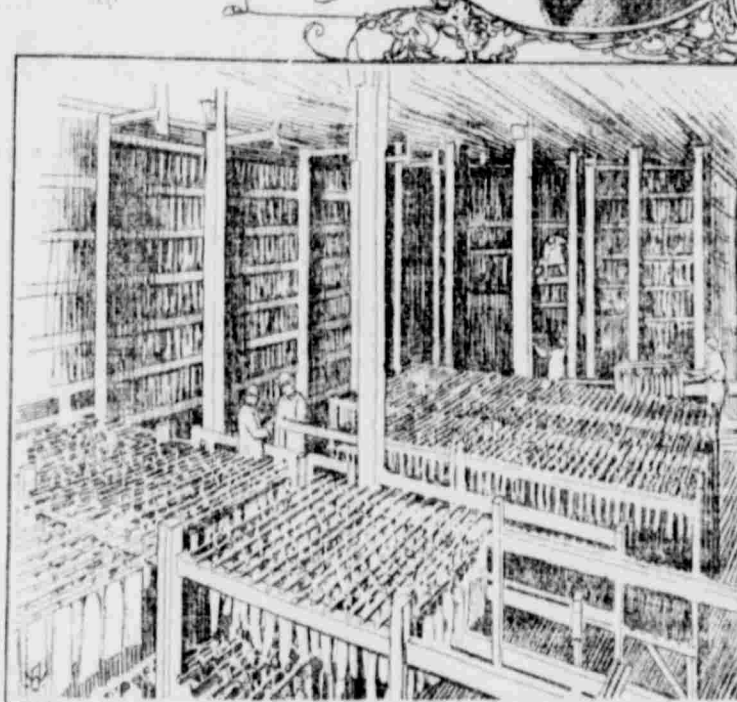


WRAPPING BUTTERINE

Not only was this increase manifest in the immediate vicinity of Chicago, but the ranges of the great plains began to teem with herds and flocks. This was followed by the most rapid extension of railroad systems ever known.

This extensive concentration of live stock in a great centralized market, with transportation facilities reaching to every part of the nation, made possible the development of the modern packing plant. From the first it has been a fascinating proposition. The wonderful economy in the preparation and handling of meats and complete utilization of the offal appealed strongly to those who looked into the matter from a commercial standpoint. It was so successful that in a very short time the old wasteful system which depended on the village slaughter house was driven practically out of existence.

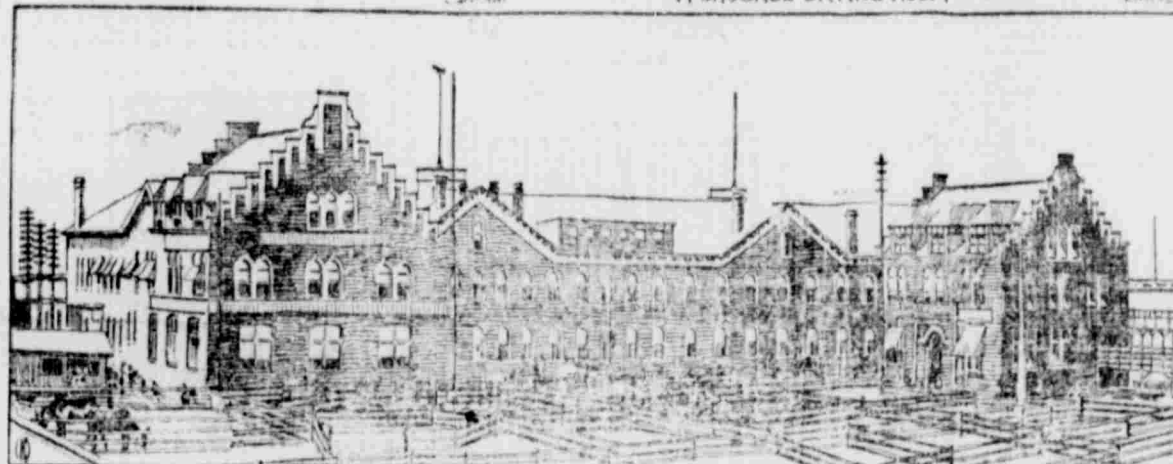
In spite of its long duration there is probably no other large business in America that is so little understood by the public at large. There are really three interests concerned, each of distinct importance—the Union Stock Yards and Transit company, the commission men who belong to the Live



A SAUSAGE DRYING ROOM



PULLING WOOL



CHICAGO LIVE STOCK EXCHANGE

Stock Exchange and the packing house companies. The Union Stockyard and Transit company is owned by eastern capitalists who have no interest in the packing industry. This company owns the yards and all of the property used as a public market. It derives its income from yardage charges, as also from the rental of a large office building and other property used for private purposes. It supplies feed and employs yardmen to unload and care for stock and also owns the scales and furnishes men to weigh all live stock sold

Since this company does not deal in live stock its business is limited to maintaining a great public market to which any farmer or stock raiser may come and sell his product to any one he wishes. Here, also, may be found the buyers for the packing houses and local butchers and those engaged in the export trade. The farmer may act as his own salesman if he wishes, but it is the almost universal custom to employ commission men. It is supposed that they will be able to secure better prices on account of their familiar acquaintance with the market.

This commission business has assumed extensive proportions. At the present time there are about 200 commission firms at the yards. Some of them make a specialty of buying for the export trade, but most of them act as agents for farmers in the sale of live stock. The rules under which they do business are made and enforced by the Live Stock Exchange, and there is little opportunity for unfair dealing. The exchange itself is a most dignified concern. It has about 250 members

altogether, comprising live stock producers, shippers, packers, commission men and bankers, organized not so much for profit as for the protection of mutual interests. This is the association which should have made such a revelation as "The Jungle" and the report of President Roosevelt's investigators impossible. One of its most conspicuous duties is to secure adequate inspection of animals and meats. In this it seems to have failed miserably. Another special function of the exchange is to secure legislation for the promotion of live stock interests. This it seems to have made an effort to do and to have succeeded admirably.

This Live Stock Exchange has always borne an excellent reputation. Its members are for the most part men who stand high in the community, and there have been surprisingly few scandals in connection with the body. Transactions at the yards are always conducted in a singularly upright and satisfactory manner, any attempt at sharp practice being dealt with in a summary manner by the exchange. It is perhaps the only market in the world in which business amounting to millions of dollars daily is done without a written record of each transaction. This of itself shows that the yards are not a safe shelter for men of dubious business ways.

The scale of commissions is fixed by the exchange on a fair basis, so that the income of each commission man is

determined by the amount of business he can obtain—by the number of farmers and country shippers whose good will and patronage he can retain by efficient and faithful service. Half of the cattle received at the yards are shipped by the farmers without the intervention of middlemen. The shipper usually comes along in person.

While it is true that some of the packers are members of the exchange, their representation is very small compared with the number of persons and firms representing the sellers of live stock. Realizing its responsibility to the public, the exchange has always made a great point of its power and willingness to maintain a keen oversight of the enormous traffic done at the yards and the equally important business going on in Packingtown. It has always made a great feature of the system of government inspection which has been in force, of which it is the responsible cause. Until recent disclosures neither the efficiency of this service nor the ability of the exchange has been called in question.

This arrangement, so satisfactory, apparently, to the meat packers, is the exchange and to the government inspectors, might have continued indefinitely if a young man in search of literary stimulus had not taken it into his head to study the matter at close range. He took up his abode in the packing house district and went about with his eyes open. What he saw

made them open "wider and more widely still." Then followed "The Jungle," which is a "novel with a purpose" if ever there was such a thing. It is Zolaesque in its realism and not agreeable reading, but it bears the impress of truth. If it had gone the way of most novels by comparatively unknown writers, the Live Stock Exchange and the packers would have been spared much inquisition.

But it was read. The American public read it and believed it. Suspicion concerning the methods of the meat barons had long been entertained in various quarters, and the revelations of "The Jungle" made it so like certainty that the country shuddered and experienced a universal nausea. Among those who read the book was Theodore Roosevelt. He suggested frankness, appealed to the president and he made up his mind to satisfy himself whether or not the story were true. With the directness and quick initiative that one has learned to expect of him he sent experts with a commission to learn the worst, the very worst.

What that worst proved to be is alien to the purpose of this article. It is sufficient to record that it was established beyond question that the Live Stock Exchange had overestimated most unaccountably its ability to regulate the business methods of the meat packers. This body of self constituted champions of the public interests actually knew less of the unappetizing things that were going on in the packers' establishments than did the general public.

Most startling of all was the discovery by the president's searchers that the government's million dollar a year inspection service was the most pitiful sort of failure. Instead of acting as a check upon the reprehensible practices of the packers, it served to assist them in their policy of concealment and disregard for decency. It gave them the opportunity to insist that all their work was conducted under government supervision and that nothing detrimental to the public interest could be done. With both United States inspectors and those appointed by the state of Illinois in constant attendance at the yards and with a heavy fine prescribed for any commission man who should sell an unfit animal, the packers and manufacturers of byproducts might pose as the ideals of industrial virtue.

Having satisfied themselves of the puerility of the existing provisions for inspection, it did not take long for the president and his friends in congress to set on foot a movement looking to the betterment of the situation. A bill was framed and introduced into the upper house by Senator Beveridge of Indiana which completely reverses the government's policy of meat inspection.

Strange as it must appear, the meat packers have arrayed themselves in the garb of comparative virtue. Without attempting either to deny the charges made against them or to justify their conduct they declare that among all such offenders they are the least; that their sins against the gustatory apparatus of the American public are as nothing compared with those of a dozen kindred industries—fish curing and canning, especially the salmon canning industry of the Pacific coast; fruit and vegetable canning in tins, sugar refining, the preparation of cereals, and even dairying and cheese-making.

"Let the public judge us," they propose, "after it has been told the story of the others. When it learns the truth there will be a stampede to an exclusive meat diet. Our products will appear then as the most appetizing tidbits that can be offered to the human palate."

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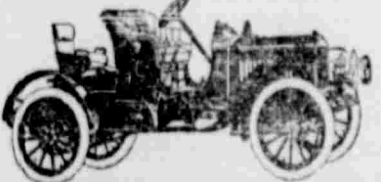
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