

1899.

NEW ZEALAND.

TUBERCULOSIS.

REPORT OF ROYAL COMMISSION, DATED 4TH APRIL, 1898, PRESENTED TO THE IMPERIAL PARLIAMENT.

*(From the Politicians' Handbook.)**Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Leave.*

THIS Commission was appointed to inquire "what administrative procedures are available and would be desirable for controlling the danger to man through the use as food of the meat and milk of tuberculous animals; and what are the considerations which should govern the action of the responsible authorities in condemning for the purpose of food supplies, animals, carcasses, or meat exhibiting any stage of tuberculosis." They say that nothing has come before them to raise any doubt as to the accuracy of the opinion of the Royal Commission of 1895, that tubercular disease in bovine and other animals is identical with that in the human subject, and that it is communicable from one to the other; and also of opinion that "any person who takes tuberculous matter into the body as food incurs risk of acquiring tuberculous disease." At the same time they think there has been a tendency to exaggerate the extent of the risk arising from meat. Discussing the extent to which the herds of the United Kingdom have become infected with tuberculosis they say: "Overwhelming evidence proved the greater prevalence of tuberculosis among dairy stock than among bullocks or heifers, owing, no doubt, to the close confinement of cows during a great part of the year, sometimes throughout the year, to their greater average age, and to the severe drain on them caused by milking. It is a common practice with cowkeepers to maintain a high temperature in the byres, which is rarely found associated with efficient ventilation. One very serious feature in the distribution of this disease is its prevalence among high-class pedigree stock. This does not appear to arise from any greater predisposition to the disease among highly-bred animals, but partly because that, owing to the high value of certain strains, cows are retained for breeding purposes much longer than would be the case in ordinary stock, and partly because, when young, they are commonly subjected to more artificial treatment than less valuable stock. The result of Sir Thomas Gibson Carmichael's experiments upon pedigree stock, and of those conducted over a period of five years in Denmark under superintendence of Professor Bang, shows how much can be done towards eliminating the disease from any herd kept under good sanitary conditions, by isolating such animals as react to the tuberculin test. Several witnesses (both veterinary surgeons and others) expressed the opinion that some breeds of cattle, such as Shorthorns, Jerseys, and Ayrshires, are more susceptible of tuberculosis than others, such as the Welsh breeds, Herefords, and Highland cattle. No doubt they were speaking accurately from the result of their observations, but a careful comparison of the facts collected during our inquiry, over a very wide and varied field, has convinced us that the chief element in immunity from tuberculosis is to be found in the conditions under which cattle are reared and kept. Shorthorns, Jerseys, and Ayrshires are the principal dairy breeds in this country; dairy cows, as a rule, are kept more in houses than is the case with cattle meant for slaughter; such houses are often ill-ventilated, ill-lighted, ill-drained, and ill-cleaned. It is not surprising, therefore, if tuberculosis prevails to a very large extent among that class of stock." The disease is almost unknown among cows kept in the open air. Examining the legislation and practice for the inspection of meat, they point out that "there is a total absence of uniformity in the special qualifications required of the persons employed as meat inspectors by the sanitary authorities in different places, as may be seen by a return presented to the House of Commons in 1896, showing the previous vocations of those acting in that capacity. In Battersea, for instance, four plumbers and three carpenters discharge the office of meat inspector; in Hackney the duties have been committed to two plumbers, one carpenter, one compositor, one bricklayer, one florist, one builder, one surveyor, and one stonemason. In Portsmouth a solitary butcher has received as colleagues three school teachers, one medical dispenser, one carpenter, and one tram-conductor." As to the amount and distribution of tubercular disease which justifies the seizure and condemnation of a carcase as unfit for human food, the widest discrepancy prevails in opinion and practice. "Chaos is the only word to express the absence of system in the inspection and seizure of tuberculous meat, and it has, in our opinion, become necessary that regulations should be formulated for the guidance of those who are concerned in dealing with this subject. In Belfast the presence of tuberculosis in any degree is