

Editorials

The Beef Investigation

THE charges made by Mr. Upton Sinclair against the beef packers' methods, put into his novel, but vouched by him to be true, have been examined by two most admirable men selected by the President, and to the surprise of many people the muck rake is vindicated. The investigators were Charles P. Neill, Commissioner of Labor, a Johns Hopkins Ph.D. and former Professor of Political Economy in the Catholic University, and James B. Reynolds, for many years head worker of the University Settlement in this city, another equally competent man. They found things very nearly as bad as Mr. Sinclair had reported, and so they told the President; and now the President has told Speaker Cannon, who has gone over the evidence with Dr. Neill, and is satisfied that drastic legislation for supervision is necessary. The report of the two commissioners has not been compiled, but only given orally to the President, with the accompanying documents; but it should be made up and given to the public. When great companies in co-operation corner and control the food market the people have the right to know what is given them to eat. We should not have meat distributed for sale here which would be refused admission into Germany. It is no matter how foul the conditions are, we must know them, no matter whom they hurt, nor how many they disgust. We do not want to be reduced to the dietary restriction of the old English proverb that "Eggs, apples and nuts can be bought of sluts." Such facts as are indicated in the Neill-Reynolds report might make vegetarians of us, if the conditions described were necessary. But they are not. Only greed has created and maintained them.

There are some evils of business under concentrated control for which public ownership is the remedy. Such are the utilities that are natural monopolies, such as streets, railways, telegraphs and telephones. There are others in which competition is feasible, or should be if competition is free. Such are the sugar industry, the theater industry and the meat

industry. But monopoly has found the way to suppress competition. It simply crushed it by suffocation. Then it is likely to oppress the consumer, having first oppressed the rival producers. Now is the time for the Government to step in and correct the abuse. We are not yet ready to do this by the socializing of all industries; but we can insist that the public shall supervise all great and wealthy corporations that purvey for the public. The railroads shall give just and equal rates, and the meat sold to us shall be healthy and clean. The Beveridge bill, or one more stringent, should be speedily passed by Congress.

In this matter two men deserve great praise. The first is Mr. Sinclair, who went to Packingtown to live, and there studied the conditions, and brought them to the knowledge of the public. The other is the President. He may not have expected that the investigation would support Mr. Sinclair, but he saw that something ought to be done, and he has an uncommon faculty of seeing to it that what ought to be done is done. But for him Mr. Sinclair's assertions might have been regarded as the ravings of a wild magazinist eager for his penny-a-lining. And now the President and Mr. Sinclair are doing just what Harriet Beecher Stowe did fifty years ago. When they said her story of slave life was false, she published a "Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin," full of facts and data. That is what Mr. Sinclair is now doing effectively, and what Messrs. Neill and Reynolds are doing; and the public will have the advantage.

But we ask, Are there no pure and honest wealthy corporations? See what graft the head men of the Pennsylvania Railroad are confessing to. And the President of the Reading Railroad says that his is about the only honest railroad company.