

IS PORTO RICO A DUMPING MARKET?

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Few realize when speaking of the Department of Health to what extent it has to deal with human activities in every sphere of life, and a large majority still fail to connect the work of this department with commercial life. What is true of every State of the Union is true of Porto Rico, and so, while many do not at once see the connection of the market with the Department of Health of Porto Rico, after making a careful study of this association there will be no doubt in their minds as to the close relationship which exists between them.

The name "Dumping market", originated by the wholesale dealers who sustain a steady commercial competition between the huge melting pot on the banks of the Hudson and the small and modest market of Porto Rico, is by no means complimentary. The majority of the merchants of the Island have become accustomed to the epithet and accept it as a candid and innocent one. The importer places the responsibility of the familiar offense upon the retailer. The retailer places it upon the consumer with the malicious justification that the consumer accepts a price regardless of quality because this is not the most important feature in the transaction. On the other hand both retailers and consumers blame the importer, who in his desire to obtain the greatest profits, buys in enormous lots or quantities at a very reduced price and sells to the small merchant on the same basis and at the same price that he would sell a selected article of excellent quality. For example, the importer, having an enviable reputation as a business man, makes a rapid trip to New York and buys in the jobbing quarters of the great metropolis a lot of merchandise at the rate of ninety cents per article, and this importer sells the article a little later for three dollars. Fantastic anecdotes such as these whether true or false, are continually being circulated.

Fine articles, generally speaking, seem to be excluded for an express purpose, although those interested in these transactions have found some exceptions, but the most severe and bitter criticism arises in connection with articles consumed which are not precisely those of great necessity but are articles which occupy the second place

in the scale of quality. Articles of luxury, automobiles, fine perfumery, textiles and the finest novelties in dress fabrics as well as jewelry are entailed, needless to say, in those of first place mentioned above, while articles of moderate price and consequently of inferior taxation such as dresses, suits, shoes, underwear, furniture, glassware and china are contained in the second.

While the Department of Health of Porto Rico is not directly interested in the economic problem which this matter presents, nor with the frauds probably perpetrated upon the public due to the conditions set forth, it is very much concerned with the indirect results of these conditions which affect the welfare of the people and public health. For instance paints, combustible materials and materials of construction represent industrial activities which although outside the radius of sanitary vigilance, in the ordinary course of commercial and professional transactions the hygienic standpoint must be taken into consideration from the moment that the use of such materials affect the life and health of the citizens. So in the matter of determining whether paints are harmful or combustible materials are dangerous or constructions are defective, the relationship with the Department of Health can be established.

Which then, is the most important point of contact between this great commercial problem and the Department of Health of Porto Rico? May it not be true that the observer who has not viewed the situation keenly has failed to comprehend that foodstuffs, beverages, drugs, medicines and all raw and finished materials used as a basis for medicinal and diatetic purposes form the focussing point of the hygienist with regard to the matter in question? And in view of the fact that the Department of Health of Porto Rico has in hand statistics compiled for several years by the Chemical Laboratory showing the destruction of food stuffs of inferior quality, it is the duty of this Department, to deny or prove the fairness of the epithet "Dumping Market" which has been applied to the Island, and which, to say the least, is irritating and offensive.

In future articles different aspects of the matter in question will be treated.