

# SPECIAL REPORT

ON

## PICTOU CATTLE DISEASE, 1906

OTTAWA, March 31, 1906.

I have the honour to report that the results of the investigation into the nature and causes of Pictou Cattle Disease, which was begun at Antigonish in October, 1903, have been sufficiently definite to warrant me in recommending the removal of this malady from the list of those coming under the operation of the Animal Contagious Diseases Act. For upwards of twenty years it has been the policy of the department to order the slaughter of affected animals and to pay compensation for them, as also to insist on the disinfection of the buildings in which they have been kept. During the whole of this time, and in fact for many years previous, the more intelligent residents of the district in which the disease prevails have been of the opinion that it is not only non-contagious, but that its prevalence is due to or connected in some way with the weed known as *Senecio Jacobea* or Ragwort, locally known as Stinking Willie. Evidence existed to show that the disease was unknown until the weed in question was accidentally introduced with ballast brought from Scotland to the town of Pictou some fifty years ago. Once established the plant spread gradually through the surrounding country, extending, however, owing to the prevailing winds, the seed being light and easily carried by their agency, to a much further distance eastward than westward of its original starting point. Shortly afterwards the disease made its appearance, and although some years elapsed before any suspicion of the weed being its cause was aroused, it was at last noted as a peculiar evidence that only the cattle kept in the weedy area were affected. As time passed it was further observed that the mere presence of the plant in a district was not apparently sufficient to produce the affection, but that it was only after it had obtained a firm foothold in the pastures and meadows that the disease began to make its appearance.

About the year 1882, an attempt at investigation was made and some experiments were undertaken with a view to ascertaining whether or not there was any foundation for the popular belief as to the connection between the weed and the disease, which, by this time, had been recognized as a peculiar and almost specific cirrhosis of the liver. Unfortunately, however, these experiments were unsuccessful in throwing any new light on the subject, with the result that Pictou Cattle Disease was declared to be contagious, and the policy of slaughter and compensation above referred to brought into force. From time to time in after years, the subject was investigated by Dr. William Osler, Dr. Adami, the late Dr. Wyatt Johnston and other skilled pathologists, but invariably with negative results, so far at least as concerned the establishment of any definite and intelligent theory as to its true nature and causes.