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Contagious Abortion in Cattle

(By C. D. McGilvray, M.D.V., Winnipeg, Man.)

The condition known as Abortion or "slinking the calf," is one which is often encountered among pregnant cattle. Its occurrence is increasing and is becoming more acutely felt by many breeders, by noticeably lessening the productiveness of their herds.

It has commonly been ascribed to result from a variety of causes, such as errors in feeding and watering, ac-cidents and injuries of all kinds, influences of the weather, and also to sup posed defects in the male parent. While abortion, no doubt, may result in some cases from such causes, however, the way in which many of them operate in causing the untimely delivery, has not been acceptably explained, and it would appear that they only account for a very small percentage of the cases in cattle, the larger percentage resulting from a communicable disease, or what is termed "Contagious Abortion."

This disease may be described as a contagious affection of cattle which is manifested by the premature expulsion or untimely delivery of the foetus, owing to an infectious catarrh set up in the womb, the cause of which has been shown to be due to the presence of a germ known as the Bacillus Abortus, or Bang's Bacillus of Cattle Abor-

Methods of Infection

The manner in which animals become infected, or contract the disease, has been a matter of some dispute. In this connection somewhat extensive investigations have been conducted and the conclusions of certain reliable investigators of the disease would seem to warrant the recognition of two chan-nels by either of which the infection, or germ, may enter the system and reach the womb; one mode being by the mouth and the other by the vagina or genital passage. The possibility of cattle contracting the disease by infection entering thru the mouth into the digestive tract was not generally recognized until during the last few years. However, the experiments and observa-tions of McFadyean and Stockman, in Great Britain, as well as some others, have demonstrated that it is probably one of the most common means by which the infection may take place. The infected matter comes from the womb of infected cattle in the form of a discharge which contains the bacilli or germs in great numbers. These infective discharges being expelled are liable to contaminate any litter and fodder, such as hay and straw, pastures, and water, which in turn are taken into the mouth and consumed by other pregnant animals. The germs of the disease, which may thus have been taken into the mouth, are in turn swal-lowed and pass into the intestines or bowels, from which they are absorbed and are carried by the blood throat the system, until finally they reach and locate themselves in the wall of the womb, which is their favorite place of abode. It is also claimed by some that the germs, in certain cases, even locate themselves in the udder, where they remain stationary for a variable period, and are given off in the milk.

With regard to infection taking place by means of the vagina and genital passage, this was formerly thought to be the main and only method of entrance. It was contended that the discharges from aborting animals, dropping in places such as gutters in the stables, or against the stalls, or being switched by the tails of infected cattle against the genitals of other pregnant cattle occupying adjacent stalls, or the infection being conveyed from female to female thru the medium of the bull during service, constituted the only methods, and essential factors in conveying the disease, by affording a means of entrance directly into the genital passage. Due regard and consideration must always be given to these factors and means of conveying infection, altho the conclusions of the more recent in vestigations, especially those of Me-Fadyean and Stockman, in Great Britain, incline to the view that infection takes place more frequently by the mouth, thru ingesting food and water contaminated with infected discharges from aborting cattle.

Irrespective of the manner, by means of which the germs may have entered the body, upon their reaching the womb of pregnant cattle, they begin to operate harmfully by giving rise to a cat-arrhal condition of its surface (mucous membrane) and also of the contacting foetal membrane (the chorion) causing a gradual separation of the placenta (which forms the nutritive medium or means of connection between the mother and the foetus); which usually results in causing the death of the foetus and its premature expulsion, or untimely

Symptoms and Course of the Disease Abortion may take place in pregnant cattle without any previous warnings or indications of its approach and the animal may appear quite well almost up to the moment when the foetus is expelled. The act of expulsion may be quite sudden and prompt and often occurs during the night and in the morning the aborted foetus is found beside the mother, which on the previous evening has appeared to be quite well. In other cases, indications of its probable approach are manifested by the animal, and she is noticed to be restless and uneasy and to keep whisking the tail. The udder may become somewhat enlarged and swollen, denoting the appearance commonly termed "making a bag." The vulva appears swollen and coming from it may be noticed a yellow colored sticky discharge, after which there follows the usual manifestations of impending expulsion of the foctors. of impending expulsion of the foetus. It has also been noticed in a large number of cases of cattle abortion, after expulsion of the calf, the after birth is retained, or as commonly expressed, "the cow fails to clean," and even when after-birth is not retained, a thin, yellowish discharge continues to come from the genital passage for several weeks thereafter. The course of the disease is, as a rule, slow, and the period at which the abortion takes place is variable. The majority of cases seem to occur between the fifth and seventh months of pregnancy

The usual experience in outbreaks of contagious abortion is that during the first two or three years of its appearance in a herd, it claims many victims and then becomes reduced to a smaller number of cases occurring each year, unless many new females are introduced. which in turn become attacked. Amongst infected cows, a large percentage abort twice in succession, and a certain number three times, after which they some-times appear to acquire a degree of imor resistance to the disease, which enables them to reach the normal period of calving. This feature has apparently led some to volunteer the statement that the disease will disappear of its own accord, or run itself out of a herd in the course of three or four years, provided no freshly infected cows are introduced. This contention is, however, not altogether tenable, because even when no freshly infected cows are introduced, the tendency is for the disease to prevail and attack the young females in the herd, unless special measures are taken to protect It is also noticed in a herd where contagious abortion prevails that sterility, or barrenness, also prevails, so that the number of "shy breeders" increases in the herd.

Means of Detecting the Disease The importance of being able, if possible, to detect and recognize the disease when it first occurs in a herd is that measures may be taken to arrest its progress. In this regard the safest course to pursue is to accept the fact of any cow aborting on premises formerly exempt as a reason for suspecting that the disease has been introduced, and particularly where new females have entered the Additional cases occurring at intervals in the herd should be sidered confirmatory of contagious abortion being the cause.

Experiments have been made with the view of devising and adopting some



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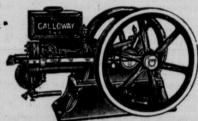
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