39

16 June 1941

To the Editor of
The Farmers' Weekly,
43/44, Shoe Lane,
London, E.C.4.

Sir,

CONTAGIOUS ABORTION

Arising out of two recent articles in The Farmers' Weekly by Mr. Kenneth Crawley (April 10th) and Dr. P.S. Watts (May 30th) on contagious abortion, I should like to make a suggestion which, if adopted, will show how this and other diseases of live stock can be reduced to their normal insignificance.

I have it on the authority of several distinguished pioneers in medical research that the parasite associated with this disease can only invade the host after the long continued malnutrition of the afflicted animal. Contagious abortion therefore falls into line with many other diseases of plants, animals and mankind the cause of which can be traced back to an impoverished soil. Cases of the reduction of such diseases by the adoption of good farming methods are constantly reaching me from correspondents all over the world.

I suggest that the time has come to try out a simple method of preventing contagious abortion altogether. In one or two of the best grazing areas of Western England, where this disease is rife, a few farms should adopt mixed farming and get the land (arable and grass) into first class condition by means of freshly

prepared humus at the same time producing all the food required by the stock on the farms themselves without recourse to artificial manures or imported feeding stuffs. Provided all due care is taken in the selection of the animals, in the details of management and in the raising of their food, it is quite safe to predict that in less than five years two important results will have been obtained: (1) contagious abortion will have disappeared altogether and (2) herds will be available for trying out an experiment I am most anxious to see made, namely the letting loose into these farms of animals infected with such diseases as contagious abortion, foot-and-mouth disease and so forth. Naturally some audacious and resolute innovator of the Hosier type will be needed for the second phase of this experiment but a countryside which in days gone by produced a Cromwell and his Ironsides is not likely to fail us now.

I might mention that the first steps in the direction indicated have already been successfully taken: others are under way. A well-known tomato grower in the South of England recently converted a mass of diseased tomatoes into humus and applied the manure to the same houses for more tomatoes. An excellent crop free from disease was obtained, a result which flatly contradicted the teaching and prognostications of the specialists maintained by the Ministry of Agriculture. So it will be when cases of abortion and foot-and-mouth come in contact with animals properly fed, properly housed and properly managed; no infection will take place: the infected animals will recover: the vast edifice for the control

of animal diseases will collapse: the farmers of this country will free themselves once and for all from the thraldom imposed by fear of the parasite. Contagious abortion and foot-and-mouth disease are examples of Nature's censors for indicating unsound methods of agriculture. If we could only follow Nature's lead these troubles will prove to be our best friends and not our worst foes.

Your obedient servant,

Albert Howard

14, Liskeard Gardens,
Blackheath, S.E.3.

11th June, 1941.