

## **ABORTION PRODUCED BY SMUT IN OATS**

TO THE EDITORS OF THE TENNESSEE STATE AGRICULTURIST:

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by Francis H. Gordon

GENTLEMEN: The farming community ought to be informed (if they do not already know it) that black heads or smut of Oats will cause mares and other domestic animals to miscarry. A case lately occurred in this vicinity which establishes the fact, as clearly as it can be done without direct experiment.

Mr. Willie Denney had four mares in foal, three of which have lost their colts this spring. The whole were fed during the winter on corn and fodder, and all did well. About the first of March they were furnished with cut oats instead of fodder. One mare soon lost her colt, and continued to exhibit every sign of labor pains for several days till she died. A short time after, two others lost their colts and continued to make apparent efforts to foal, showing uterine contraction for ten days. They reduced rapidly in flesh, till Mr. Denney informed me of the circumstance, when, suspecting the smut to be the cause, I advised him to discontinue the oats as a feed. He did so, and the mares soon began to recover.

Why did not the fourth mare lose her colt also? Because she was not fed on oats. She has brought a colt to the proper time. A gelding and two oxen were fed on the oats during the whole time, and did well; because they had no wombs to be affected by the smut. Why did Mr. Denney's oats produce abortion, while other farmers have fed their mares on oats without such misfortunes? Because Mr. Denney's oats had between one fourth and one third of black heads, while theirs were probably better oats. Why did the mares continue to show signs of powerful uterine contraction after they had lost their colts? or why did the labor last so long? Because they were continually fed with the same oats; and therefore every meal produced new labor pains. But when the two last mares were put upon fodder instead of the oats, the womb was no longer stimulated to contract and they immediately recovered.

The Ergot, an unhealthy growth of Rye, has long been known to produce contraction of the womb, and has been much used in midwifery for that purpose; but I do not think that the smut of oats was ever suspected of having a similar effect. Now, I think it quite probable, that many colts

have been lost from this cause, which farmers ascribed to clover, flax seed, beef blood, swimming in water, etc. Many mare has no doubt by smut been sent to a stallion for the whole season without proving with foal. From this cause it is probable, that man aand horse has been charged with partial impotency; the mare did not prove with foal, and it was said to be the horses fault but was in the feed given the mare. Let farmers give this subject a fair investigation.

Very respectfully  
F. H. Gordon

Clinton College, May, 1842.

Doctor Francis Haynes Gordon was an agriculturalist who ran a small college next door to the farm of Wiley Denney. In fact part of the land the college sat upon was purchased by Gordon from Wiley Denney. The main building of the Clinton College stood until the construction of Interstate 40 in the 1960's, when it was torn down. It stood just west of the Alexandria exit of Interstate 40 in Smith County, Tennessee. Gordon was quite an agricultural idealist and wrote articles for many agricultural publications across the South and even New York. Gordon is credited with importing the first Bluegrass, and the first improved breed of cattle-Durham-to Tennessee. He practiced his advanced agricultural techniques on his college plantation and was considered a nut by some and emulated by others. I would think that as Denney seemed willing to let Gordon study his animals, and as other records show that Gordon practiced his medicine on Denney's children, that Wiley Denney tended to emulate Gordon's practices rather than make fun of them. On a lighter note, Francis Haynes Gordon is also responsible for importing the bois-de-arc tree to Tennessee. In the 1830's so much of Middle Tennessee had been completely deforested and there was not enough wood left to build rail fences. Gordon concocted a scheme to build hedgerows like in Brittainy as fences. He imported the quickly growing and thorny bois-de-arc trees from Indian Territory for that purpose. His hedge growing scheme was effective, as the bois-de-arc worked perfectly. When you trimmed the tree the clippings took root and made the hedge denser. Kept trimmed back the trees amounted to impenetrable hedges, and allowed to grow taller they were perfect fence posts when wire fences became common. Today, the bois-de-arc tree (anglicized pronunciation bodoc) is known to most Tennesseans as the hedge apple or Osage orange tree.