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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, June 17, 1935

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "TICK TALK." Information from the Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine, U.S.D.A.

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One dangerous disease that is on the increase in this country you'll never have to suffer from unless you are bitten by one special kind of insect -- or unless you handle one. The disease is called the Rocky Mountain spotted fever, and the insect that carried it is the tick -- the common dog tick or wood tick. You may pick up a tick during a walk through the woods -- or rather, he may pick you up, for he's been lying in wait for the opportunity to fasten on some animal or human being. Or, you may get a tick from your dog. Since ticks can pass along several dangerous diseases, but especially this spotted fever, you'll be wise to examine your dog frequently from the time ticks come out in the spring -- examine them and remove any ticks, so they won't bring these insects into the house. And you'll also be wise to examine your clothes, yourself, and your children when you've been off on picnics in the woods or when you've been handling dogs.

If you've ever been bitten by a tick, you know that you may be left with a red swollen itching sore that may last for weeks and sometimes months. But this annoyance is small compared with other possible results of the bite. For certain species of ticks can give you one of several serious diseases. They not only carry germs dangerous to man, but certain kinds of ticks also convey diseases to cattle, sheep and dogs and also to wild animals.

A young tick begins his career by attacking a little woods animal -- perhaps a ground squirrel that happens to be suffering from a contagious fever. Well, the tick fills up on this sick animal's blood, and, of course, picks up germs from him. Later on, that same tick may use you as a meal and transfer those germs to you. This is the way ticks have carried rabbit fever from rabbits to people. This is the way a kind of tick found chiefly in the caves and burrows of animals in the South and West brings relapsing fever with its bite. And this is the way that ticks carry deadly Rocky Mountain spotted fever. The only way you can take this disease is through a tick bite or by contaminating your finger when picking ticks off your dog or some other animal. Of course, not all ticks have this germ -- fortunately, so far, comparatively few. And, fortunately, the tick doesn't transfer the germ to your blood stream until it has been attached for some hours. For many years only the ticks in the Rocky Mountain region carried this fever, but recently the common dog tick has become infected. So we hear of cases of this disease in many different parts of the country. Only a few weeks ago a small boy in Washington, D.C., died from spotted fever. But the malady is still most frequent in the western mountainous states, so if you live in this locality, you should take the strictest precautions against tick bites.

Once a tick gets his man, so to speak -- once he catches on your clothes as you brush against the plant or tree where he is waiting hungrily, he proceeds very cautiously until he finds just the location where he wants to take his meal. Ticks often get on the feet and legs from low vegetation and then crawl up. A favorite place to settle is in the hair where they are somewhat protected. You never feel a tick crawling on you. He knows how to step softly. And you never feel him bite. Usually you can't even detect this insect when you pass your hand over him, because he fastens so close to the skin and has such a smooth back. Not until he begins to bulge with your blood, or until you find an itching swelling on your skin do you realize that he is present. But if you look yourself over carefully, you can see a tick -- a brownish, flat, eight-legged creature about the size of half your little finger nail. A tick that has had a meal may be half an inch long and very much swollen. Engorged female ticks drop off when satisfied, seek protected places to lay their eggs and start a new generation to bother you next year. The swelling left by a tick bite is caused by a fluid which the tick injects to make the blood run more freely. This is the tick's own labor-saving invention, a way of getting more food with less effort.

Sometimes ticks cause a paralysis. Sometimes a doctor will be called to treat a child for paralysis and will find a tick fastened closely at the base of the child's scalp that hasn't even been noticed.

Now about controlling these pests. Since ticks and the small animals on which they feed like the protection of undergrowth and brush, and especially like a cool damp place, better cut away undergrowth from houses and camps, especially those along the water. Also clear underbrush away from paths used frequently. If ticks are thick near a permanent camp, you can spray around the camp and trails with creosote oil. This kills vegetation and doesn't add to the scenery at all, also it stains clothes, but it is a great help against these insects. Wild mice should be destroyed since they provide such easy food for young ticks. Since adult ticks are so common on dogs and horses, be sure to examine these animals at least every six days. Use tweezers or forceps in removing them. Never handle ticks for fear of getting fever germs on your fingers.

The right kind of clothes can also be a great protection against ticks. Close-fitting trousers and high laced boots over them ward off ticks that would crawl up your legs. Kerosene oil painted around the top of boots is a further protection. Or you can use a strip of cloth lightly treated with creosote oil and tied around the top of boots.

Then, as we said at the start, when you return from a trip to the woods, examine yourself carefully. You don't need to worry about spotted fever if you make careful examinations not more than eight hours apart, and if you see that ticks don't get a free ride indoors on your dog or your clothes. You can fumigate your clothes if necessary by putting them in a tight can with a dish of carbon tetrachloride on top.

Of course, clipping your dog is one way to keep down ticks. Then you can dust him lightly with derris powder which is harmless to him but will end the tick's life.

If you want further information about this dangerous insect, write the U.S. Department of Agriculture at Washington, D.C.

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