

The Scourge of the Woodlands

By Galen of Ockham

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We've all heard stories around the war campfire of wee people and fairies lurking in the woods to waylay weary travelers, and in my many years of travels these I have never seen. But lad, there is a wee beastie you must beware of; as I have seen this one strike strong healthy men who knew not they were under attack. They lie in wait quietly in the weeds at trailside, carrying with them disease and pestilence. They move silently and strike with deadly stealth. Who are these highwaymen who hold us under perpetual siege? They are none other than that arachnid scourge – *the tick*

We are now in the time of year when the call for battle goes out and armies march to distant and not-so-distant battlefields. However, often the greatest danger comes not from the sword of the enemy, but rather the march and the campsite. From this enemy, even the good gentles who support the men-at-arms are not safe. The tick will hide in tall grasses and shrubs, preferring to rest about 2 feet above the ground. Detecting the heat of the body and the exhaled breath of a living being, leaping to its victim, the tick finds a suitable location, often the armpit, groin, or waist to attach. It burrows its mouthparts into the skin and attaches with barbed proboscae and a natural cement. The attachment process is completely painless, making detection most difficult. The way to find if you are under attack is a complete check of the entire body every few hours. Obviously, there are parts of the body that cannot be seen with one's own eyes, and another willing gentle should be enlisted. Especial care should be given to the hair as the tick may easily hide there. Often it is better detected by feel than by sight. Note that a tick in its fasting state may be but the size of a mustard seed and quite difficult to see.

Any tick found should be removed as soon as reasonably possible, as the longer the tick feeds, the more chance it has of injecting its vile humors into its victim. Care must be taken to remove the tick in the proper manner as not to distress it too much, causing it to vomit disease-laden juices into its host. You will hear many veteran soldiers talk about burning the tick or painting it to get it to drop off. Nay, I say, as these maneuvers will surely distress the beast with dire results. Acquire a pair of fine forceps, grasp the head of the tick as close as possible to the skin, and pull straight out slowly and firmly. Watch the wound for signs of infection, which may be treated with ointments and cleansing as any other skin wound. However, after being bitten by a tick, watch especially for a rash that forms a circle around the bite giving the appearance of an archer's target and slowly enlarges. This may occur many days after the bite. This is a sign of infection by Lyme disease, and the services of a Dockor of Physick should be sought immediately. Because the tick bears many pestilences besides the disease of Lyme including Colorado Tick Fever, Babesiosis, Erlichiosis, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, Tick-Borne Relapsing Fever, Tick Paralysis, and Tularemia, any disease producing a fever or rash should be evaluated and the healer told of the bite of the tick.

As we are guided by the great healers Galen and Hippocrates, the best medicine is preventing illness. To avoid becoming a victim of the scourge tick, heed the following warnings: Travel not in high grass or shrubberies and wear light-colored clothing. Whenever possible, tuck pants legs into boots or keep legs covered. Treat thy garments with insect repellents such as Permanone (permethrin) or DEET. ("DEET", "Off", "Cutter", "Muskol".) Check yourself and household for ticks frequently – every few hours if possible, twice a day as a minimum. Only constant

vigilance will protect one from falling ill to this predator of the woodlands. We must all keep our health while on campaign to emerge from this summer season victors over both man and beast.

Friar Galen

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