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The Pestiferous Fly

The American Civic Association of Washington, which has taken upon itself the herculean task of extermination the common housefly, is sending out circulars, giving eloquent warning of the part played by flies in the dissemination of disease.

“It is at this time of the year,” says one of these circulars, “that the house flies begins to take on life for the ensuing spring and summer: eggs laid last fall will soon begin to hatch. At first, he is only a little worm, wriggling his tiny grublike form in some incubating pile of filth. He is usually found in the manure pile, the outhouse or the mound of rubbish or garbage in the back yard.

“In this condition he is easily killed—and it should be the duty of every person to kill him now. The housefly could not exist if everything were kept perfectly clean and sanitary. Exterminate the fly worm: do away with its breeding places and there will be no flies. If we are to fight the flies this summer we should use every agency possible, and the best way to fight them is to prevent their breeding.

“The common housefly is coming to be known as the typhoid fly: and when the term becomes universal greater care will be exercised in protecting the house from his presence.

“Flies kill a greater number of human beings than all the beasts of prey, with all of the poisonous serpents added. They spread disease which slays thousands, while big, powerful beasts kill single victims.

“As soon as the fly comes out of his shell he is full grown and starts out in the world to make a living and if your home is not clean he knows it by the odor. They can discern an odor of fifth for miles.

Flies Dislike Perfumes

“As much as they like filth odors they dislike other odors” where a bad odor will attract them the clean odor will repulse them. A pleasant smelling substance—the fragrance of flowers, geraniums, mignonette lavender or any perfumery—will drive them away.

“He is a frequenter of offals. The fly lays her eggs in the manure pile or other objectionable filth. All the germs—all the imaginable, abominable microbes—fasten themselves on the spongy feet of the fly. He brings them into the house and wipes them off his feet.

“The fly you see walking over the food you are about to eat is covered with filth and germs. If there is any dirt in your house or about your premises, or those of your neighbors, he has just come from it. It is his home. Watch him as he stands on the lump of sugar industriously wiping his feet. He is wiping off the disease germs: rubbing them on the sugar that you are going to eat, leaving the poison for you to swallow.

“He wipes big feet on the food that you eat, on the faces and on the lips of your sleeping children. This does more to spread typhoid fever and cholera infantum and other intestinal diseases than any other cause.

“Disease attacks human beings only when they are brought in contact with it. For instance, you cannot get typhoid fever unless you swallow the germ of typhoid, and you do not swallow these germs unless they get on the food you eat or in the liquids you drink, or on the glasses or cups from which you drink.

“Not only does he scatter the seed of disease from his body over your food, but before your fruit and vegetables are placed before you they have been subjected to his filthy habits either in the kitchen or in the stores where he flies from the horse dirt in the middle of the street to the tubercular sputum on the sidewalk, and then back to the foodstuffs displayed for sale.

“Many diseases which are attributed to milk and water originate through flies. A polluted brook, river or lake furnishes germs from sewers and flies in millions settle on the refuse that washes along water’s edge.

“Intestinal diseases are more frequent whenever and wherever flies are most abundant, and they, and not the summer heat, are the active agents in its spread.

“There is special danger when flies drop into such fluid as milk. This forms an ideal culture material for the bacillus. A few germs washed from the body of one fly may develop into millions within a few hours and the person who drinks such milk will receive large doses of bacilli, which may later cause serious sickness.”

Six Important Don'ts

The association offers a number of “don'ts” to householders, as follows:

Don't allow flies in your house.

Don't permit them near your food, especially milk.

Don't buy foodstuff where flies are tolerated.

Don't have feeding places where flies can load themselves with ejections from typhoid or dysenteric patients.

Don't allow your fruits and confections to be exposed to the swarms of flies.

Don't let flies crawl over the baby's mouth and swarm upon the nipple of its nursing bottle.

More specific directions are then given.

Here they are:

“Clean up your premises inside and out and then, as much as you can, see that others do the same.

“Strike at the root of the evil. The housefly breeds in manure, kitchen offal, and the like. Dispose of these materials in such a way that the housefly cannot propagate.

“Screen all windows and doors and insist that your grocer, butcher, baker and everyone from whom you buy foodstuffs does the same.

“There is more health in a well screened house than in many a doctor's visit.

“After you have cleaned up your own premises inspect the neighbourhood for fly breeding places. Call the attention of the owner to them and if he does not remove them complain to the Board of Health.”

How To Kill Flies

The association then goes on to offer advice regarding practical methods of combating flies.

“Not less than 93 percent of these pests,” its circular says, “breed in stables. All stables should have a manure bin with a door at the side and a wire screen on the top, that the

larvae deposited in the manure will be screened. As the young flies seek light and come to the top of the bin they can easily be killed by burning paper on some other device.

“The fly has a thirst only equalled by his hunger: place a dish of poisoned water in the stable and a greater part of the flies hatched there will be killed.

“Remember, that wherever absolute cleanliness prevails there will be no flies. Look after the garbage cans. See that they are cleaned, sprinkled with lime or kerosene oil and closely covered.

“Remove all manure from your stable every three or four days and when removed keep it in a tight pit or vault, so that flies cannot breed in it.

“Lye, chloride of lime or blue vitriol water, crude carbolic acid, or any kind of disinfectant may be used.

“Keep flies away from the kitchen. Keep flies out of the dining room and away from the sick, especially those ill with contagious diseases.

“Screen all food. Apply this rule not only to food prepared at home, but to food stuffs offered for sale and especially fruits, salads and all other things that are not required to be cooked.

“Prevent consumptives from expectorating where flies can feed.

Carbolic Acid Effective

“To clear room of flies carbolic acid may be used as follows: Heat a shovel or any similar article and drop thereon 20 drops of carbolic acid. The vapour kills the flies.

“A cheap and very reliable fly poison, one which is not dangerous to human life is bichromate of potash in sodium. Dissolve one dram which can be bought at any drug store in two ounces of water and add a little sugar. Put some of this solution in shallow dishes and distribute them about the house.

“Sticky fly paper traps and liquid poison are among the things to use in killing flies, but the latest, cheapest and best is a solution of formalin or formaldehyde in water.

“A spoonful of this liquid put into a quarter pint of water and exposed in the room will be enough to kill all the flies.

“To quickly clear the room where there are many flies, burn ... powder in the room. This stupefies the flies, when they may be swept up and burned.

“If there are flies in the dining room of your hotel, restaurant or boarding house, complain to the proprietor that the premises are not clean.”