

# A CATERPILLAR (LEPIDOPTERA: PHALAEINIDAE) FROM THE DIGESTIVE TRACT OF A HUMAN

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On June 4, 1952 in London, Ontario, a woman fifty-two years of age passed with the feces a caterpillar 16 mm. long (Fig. 1). To the physician investigating

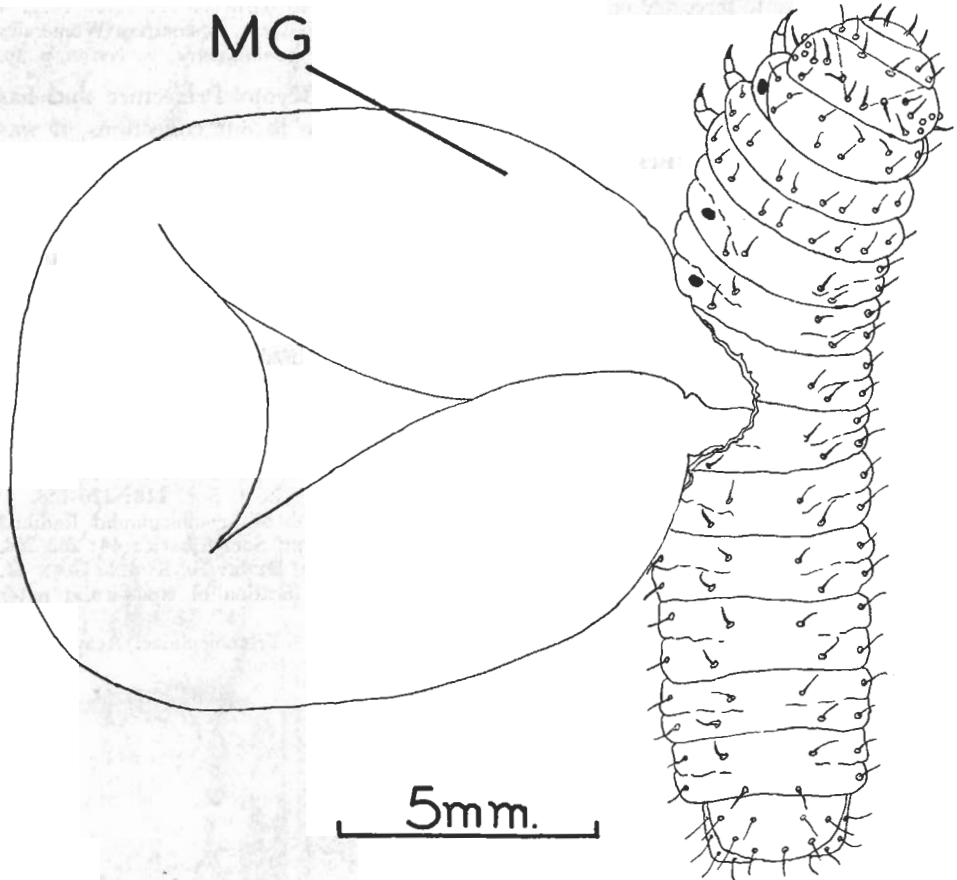


FIG. 1. Dorsal view of larva with mid-gut (MG) extending laterally through the ruptured integument.

the case she reported having experienced abdominal distress for a few days previously. Upon examination the caterpillar proved to be a larva of the family PHALAEINIDAE as identified in Peterson's key (1948). The integument was unaffected and its setae remained intact so the details of the chaetotaxy and the crochets on the plantae could be used in identifying the specimen. It keyed out in a couplet including the "smooth" cutworms. At the left side of the third and fourth abdominal

segments the integument was ruptured and the mid-gut of the larva extended laterally out of the opening in a broad loop (Fig. 1-MG). This extrusion of the digestive tract had allowed a telescoping of the body segments, so the length of the larva, in its intact state, was probably considerably greater than 16 mm. The loop of mid-gut was opened and was found to be crammed with green, undigested plant tissue. The likelihood is that the larva had been ingested with green vegetable food and during its passage through the alimentary canal of the patient the integument had been broken with consequent extrusion of the digestive tract.

In discussing the ways in which insects attack animals, Kirby and Spence (1818, 1826) used the term *scoleciasis* to denote the invasion of animal tissues by larval insects. They cited an instance of a boy vomiting up caterpillars. Hope (1840) restricted the term (*scholechiasis*) to cases involving lepidopterous larvae only, as distinct from cases involving coleopterous larvae (*canthariasis*) and dipterous larvae (*myiasis*) and he gave various examples of the occurrence of caterpillars in humans, e.g. larvae of *Noctua*. Matheson (1950) also restricted the term (*scoleciasis*) to instances involving lepidopterous larvae and stated that no reports of its occurrence appear in recent literature. It is evident from examples cited by these authors that well authenticated cases of scoleciasis of human tissues are rare and that instances of invasion by caterpillars are mostly accidental. In the case reported by the present writer the caterpillar was probably accidentally ingested with the food.

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