



Mushrooms and Toadstools

MANY a camp-supper crisis is precipitated by someone bringing in a mess of beautiful, appetizing mushrooms. The finder is sure they are all right; somebody else is equally sure they are "toadstools." You hate to waste them, and you are afraid to eat them. What to do about it?

There is only one thing that can be done about it: have some really well-informed nature student in your party, who knows the difference between good and bad mushrooms. No rule-of-thumb test is worth anything: poisonous mushrooms do not turn silver spoons black; the peeling of the cap is not an index to edibility; black gills, supposed to be a sign of deadliness, are actually a feature of some of the best mushrooms. There is no royal road to mushroom knowledge; you simply must know the good ones and the bad, species by species.

One simplification can be offered: NEVER eat a mushroom that has a cup around its base and a ring or collar around its stem. Such a mushroom belongs to the deadly genus *Amanita*. A mushroom with only the cup, or one with only the ring, is safe enough; but ring-

plus-cup are the skull-and-crossbones of the fungus world.

It is quite true that there are non-poisonous *Amanitas*, including the famous orange-colored Caesar's mushroom, favorite of ancient Roman gourmets. But it is safer for the amateur to let all *Amanitas* severely alone.

The *Amanitas* are the only dangerous mushrooms that are at all common, but there are other poisonous species. These are mostly just "bellyachers"—they'll make you sick but are not likely to kill you.

If you feel ill after a camp meal, don't always blame the mushrooms. It may be nothing but over-eating that ails you. However, if there are several persons afflicted, all of whom ate the mushrooms, administer emetics and then go to bed as

soon as possible and keep warm. Strong black coffee or other stimulants help the patient over "weak spells." But avoid any form of alcohol; it is not a stimulant but a depressant, the worst thing imaginable under the circumstances. Get a doctor as quickly as possible.

What is the difference between a mushroom and a toadstool? There isn't any difference: the two names are synonyms. Any fungus that has an expanded, more or less circular cap borne on a more or less vertical stalk is a mushroom. It is also a toadstool. The two names are shape-names pure and simple. They do not have anything to do with distinction between poisonousness and edibility.

Nevertheless, it is probably better table manners if you refrain from saying, "Have some more toadstools!"

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PSYCHIATRY

## New Clue to Epilepsy Found by Hay Fever Tests

THE super-sensitiveness which causes hay fever and hives provides a new clue to epilepsy and mental disorders, it was reported by Dr. Joseph A. Beauchemin of the Middletown, Conn., State Hospital at the meeting of the American Psychiatric Association.

The clue was gleaned from study of the reddened areas called wheals which appear on the skins of sensitive persons shortly after a drop of protein solution has been injected into the skin. The procedure of making these skin tests is familiar to hay fever and asthma patients and sufferers from similar disorders which physicians call allergic. The common feature of all the disorders, ranging from hay fever to migraine headache and hives, is a super-sensitiveness to protein from various sources: plant pollen; foods like milk, eggs, shellfish; feathers; or dust.

Proteins from meats and cereals and fats produced the wheals on the skin of eight-tenths of the epileptic patients, he studied, Dr. Beauchemin reported. From this he concluded that a disturbance in the handling of these foods by the body tissues is an important feature in epilepsy.

The wheals—positive reaction to the scientists—were caused in sufferers from mental disorders not by food or plant proteins but by solutions of gland substances. Patients suffering from dementia

precox were super-sensitive to thymus and sex gland extracts, indicating a disturbance in these glands which may be only a concurrent symptom or may be of more significance.

Patients in the excited phase of manic-depressive disorder were as a group super-sensitive to adrenal, thyroid and pituitary substances. A possible over-activity of the pituitary and adrenal glands which in turn stimulates the thyroid and sex glands is Dr. Beauchemin's interpretation of the results of skin tests with this group. Patients in the depressed phase of the same mental disorder reacted to the gland substances in a way suggesting over-activity of the pituitary and of the cortex of the adrenal glands. More of these patients than of those in any of the other group showed super-sensitiveness to proteins from bacteria, indicating that they might be more susceptible to infectious diseases.

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