



A Pallid Brotherhood

FUNGI are a pallid brotherhood. Not theirs the gleaming green that is for plants the equivalent of the red glow of health in higher animals. They have no chlorophyll, they cannot make their own foods. So they must do as we and the animals do, and eat foods already made.

Some fungi are parasites, feeding on the still-living bodies of plants and animals. Most, however, are not hawks but vultures, devouring the dead. There is a special name for this mode of living on dead things, a companion-word for parasitism. Such plants are called saprophytes. Freely translated from the Greek, the word means decay-plants. Saprophytes are not to be thought of as plants that live on dead and decaying things; they themselves cause the decay by their feeding.

The visible parts of fungi, that attract our attention, are of many forms and colors. Mushrooms are most familiar, perhaps, and their relatives the puffballs, the shelf or bracket fungi that grow on trees, the odd attractive little earth-stars, and the odder but decidedly less attrac-

tive stinkhorns. A little more distantly related, but still kin to the mushrooms, are the coral-fungi, the tooth-fungi, the living jellies called tremellas, and the curious form known as Jew's-ear.

A different group, less frequently seen than the mushrooms and their relatives but very interesting in their varied forms, are the cup-fungi. You will sometimes find their bright red-orange cups on dead sticks in damp woods. Another member of this group is the morel, looking like a mushroom that tried to turn into a sponge; odd-appearing, but very good to eat. There are many bad parasitic species among the cup-fungi, among them ergot, a powerful drug.

The two foregoing great groups account for most of the larger fungi, but there is a great variety of forms that in

mass look like thin webs of cottony threads or even thick pads of felt. These include molds, mildews, etc. In this section of the fungus group also are perhaps the great majority of the parasites—rusts, smuts, wilt fungi, etc., as well as fungi that cause diseases of animals. Some of these fungi cause death of insects by countless millions.

The activities of all these pale, hungry plants sound like unrestrained destruction. To some extent it is. Plant diseases are very costly, and vast spoilage of foods, fabrics, and wood is caused by molds. But the decay of dead bodies of plants and animals is a necessary thing, lest they cumber the earth, and this scavenger work by innumerable fungi must be counted one of the great beneficial activities of plants.

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PUBLIC HEALTH

Health Army Has War Maps For Disease Fight

MOST newspaper readers are familiar with the pin- or flag-marked war maps that show the advancing or retreating lines of conflict and other important information on which battle plans are laid. Some of you have doubtless kept such maps of your own for handy reference when following war news.

Did you know that the great army of health experts which fights to protect us from disease has similar war maps? They hang on the walls of every health department (or should) to give information as to the whereabouts of the enemy and his strength. They are charts showing daily, weekly, monthly and yearly reports of cases of communicable diseases.

The battle lines, marked usually by colored pins, show the advance or retreat of various disease enemies. These lines are called curves. Sometimes, as during epidemics, they are sharply pointed, advancing rapidly to a high peak and usually falling down more slowly to the normal or expected level of cases for that particular disease. The continuous downward sweep of other curves shows the triumph of medical and health science over a particular disease.

Looking over the curve of monthly mortality rate from all causes of death combined, for all ages, Metropolitan Life Insurance Company statisticians find that the enemy has been driven back on one important sector. This consists of the summer months when the death rate formerly ran high chiefly because of "the slaughter of young children by intestinal diseases." Improved sanitary conditions and purer milk and water supplies are the big guns that have broken down the enemy lines on this sector.

The health armies are concentrating now on driving back the enemy lines in the cold season of the year. This means hard fighting against pneumonia, colds, influenza and also on the chronic diseases of heart and kidneys of old people.

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It is estimated that 10 per cent of people in this country suffer from some kind of allergy, that is, are hyper-sensitive to some food or other substance.

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