

# SCIENCE

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THE DISTRIBUTION OF POISONS IN  
MUSHROOMS<sup>1</sup>

## CONTENTS

<i>The Distribution of Poisons in Mushrooms:</i>	
PROFESSOR WILLIAM W. FORD .....	97
<i>Notes on Electrical Engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology</i> .....	108
<i>Educational Section of the British Association</i> .....	109
<i>Scientific Notes and News</i> .....	109
<i>University and Educational News</i> .....	112
<i>Discussion and Correspondence:—</i>	
<i>Remarks on Recent Contributions to Cosmogony:</i> PROFESSOR F. R. MOULTON. <i>Communicating with Mars:</i> T. C. M. <i>"Typhoid Mary":</i> PROFESSOR W. P. MASON .....	113
<i>Quotations:—</i>	
Mr. Latham's Aeroplane .....	118
<i>Scientific Books:—</i>	
<i>Osgood's Revision of the Mice of the American Genus Peromyscus:</i> DR. EDGAR A. MEARNS. <i>Schryver on the General Character of the Proteins:</i> PROFESSOR LAFAYETTE B. MENDEL .....	119
<i>Special Articles:—</i>	
<i>Notes on Some Salamanders and Lizards of North Georgia:</i> H. A. ALLARD .....	122
<i>Societies and Academies:—</i>	
<i>The Geological Society of Washington:</i> FRANCOIS E. MATTHES. <i>The Academy of Science of St. Louis:</i> PROFESSOR W. E. McCOURT .....	124

## HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

EDIBLE and poisonous mushrooms have been of great popular interest from time immemorial, and the earliest histories attest the extensive use to which the harmless varieties were put, both by the peasant population of the world, forced by dire necessity to eat everything that grows, and by the wealthy classes, driven to the same end by the demands of the epicure's palate. Paulet<sup>2</sup> with whose "Traité des champignons" all mycologists must begin their studies, relates that mushrooms have from antiquity been sold, especially during Mid-Lent, in the public markets of Pekin, St. Petersburg, Florence and in other cities and towns in Tuscany. The ancient Babylonians and early Romans employed the edible species in great quantity, and the amanita which seems to me the most beautiful of all agarics, especially when the developing plants are seen in the mountains of North Carolina, the *Amanita caesaria*, owes its name to a Latin ruler.

The most interesting of the early cases of mushroom or, as commonly described, toadstool poisoning and one of the first authentic cases on record, occurred in the family of the Greek poet Euripides, who lost in one day, wife, daughter and two sons, who in the poet's absence partook of the deadly species. Among the great ones whose lives were sacrificed to the same ignorance may be mentioned the Pope Clement VII., the Emperor Jovian,

<sup>1</sup> Address delivered before a special meeting of the Boston Mycological Club, June 14, 1909.

<sup>2</sup> Paulet, "Traité des champignons," Paris, 1793.