

The Destroying Angel

By M. A. WELSH, Prince Albert

During the past summer Mr. Ed Brooman and myself undertook some exploratory work on mushrooms in our area. We had a fine time in this project as well as turning up a few problems. We did find that where ever you turned there seemed to be mushrooms and we had some fine eating even though at times we had some slight misgivings. We found mushrooms that we could not identify and others that we have but doubtful identification established. We also found some mushrooms that were not good to eat one of which I propose to discuss.

On August 31st, at Loon Lake, I stayed overnight in a small cabin outside of which grew a stately little mushroom *Amanita phalloides*, The Destroying Angel. I can assure you that I did not eat this mushroom, the most deadly of all mushrooms and the cause of over 90% of all recorded deaths from them. It would be well for all persons who collect mushrooms for eating to become very familiar with this species and its relatives. The photograph shows one of the most important in identification, the Volva or Death Cup. See how it surrounds the base of the stem. There is a ring on the stem (not visible in photo), the gills are white and free from the stem, the spore print is white.

If this mushroom is eaten there are no symptoms for a period of from six to twelve hours, an almost diagnostic sign, then there are intense and severe abdominal pains and thirst with vomiting and diarrhea. There is then usually a quiescent period of from one to two days when the symptoms recur along with damage to the nervous system, liver and kidneys. This is followed by delirium, coma and usually death. When the mushroom is taken in small quantities the symptoms are less severe and abate after several days with a slow recovery and prolonged convalescence.

The poisons contained in this mushroom are phalline, amanitin and phalloidin. The symptoms seem to be due to the amanitin rather than to the other two poisons which are



largely lost in the heat of cooking.

This is the mushroom which is alleged to have killed many famous persons over the years. The first recorded death due to mushroom poisoning being those of the family of the great Greek poet Euripides who lost in one day his wife, daughter and two sons. Other sacrificed lives due to eating this mushroom in ignorance seem to be Pope Clement VII, the Emperor Jovia, Emperor Charles VI, Berronill of Naples, the widow of Tsar Alexis and the Princess of Conti. Poisonous mushrooms have figured in many of the accidental and malicious deaths recorded in history.

This mushroom grows, as a rule, in the wooded areas, seldom in open meadows but it is well to watch carefully for it when collecting mushrooms particularly if they are destined for the skillet.

DID YOU KNOW . .

THAT only 150 copies of Mr. A. C. Budds' book, "Plants of the Farming and Ranching areas of the Canadian Prairies" are left for free distribution. Mr. Budd would like to see the "Blue Jay" readers get them, but they are going out quite rapidly. After these are gone there will be no more free copies, as the book is being revised and printed in a smaller and much more convenient form next year. It will then be on sale by the Government Printer at \$1.00 or \$1.50 per copy. Present copies may be obtained from the Experimental Station, Box 780, Swift Current.