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Toadstool Talks

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Toadstool Talks

The Good and the Bad

PLATE I is a group of photographs of four edible mushrooms with such well-marked characteristics that they cannot be mistaken or confused with the other forms.

Figure 1 is the Shaggy Mane, *Coprinus comatus*. In the field it has much the appearance of an egg standing on end. The cap is covered with silky fibres and patches of brown with a large patch on the upper end.

The stem is hollow, as shown by a longitudinal section, and has a free ring or annulus. This fungus does not open up its cap as is usually the case, but disintegrates, in the manner shown in the upper row in the figure, by dripping away as h. black ink until all has disappeared, the stem being the last to go. This is one of the very best of our edible fungi if gathered before the gills have begun to turn; and it may be eaten stem and all.

Figure 2 is the Golden Milk Mushroom. It is short and firm and of an orange color with indistinct, concentric zones on the top of the cap. There is no cup or ring and the juice is an orange milk. This is good eating.

Figure 3 is one of the Coral Fungi. The colors displayed by this genus are varied and often striking. The white forms are all edible if gathered—when perfectly fresh.

Figure 4, Satyr's Beard, is one of the fungi whose spores are borne on teeth, which in this case are long and slender. These grow on trees or decaying wood and are edible if fresh.

Deadly Toadstools

There are really very few deadly toadstools, popular opinion to the contrary notwithstanding. But that the eating of some forms is attended with peril or even death must not for one moment be lost sight of. As it happens, the really dangerous forms are to be found in a single family, whose characteristics must be thoroughly understood by those who will eat mushrooms. Do not read into this a negative that does not exist, and conclude that all forms not belonging to this family are harmless, for there are a considerable number, not included in this deadly family, whose presence in the digestive organs might produce decidedly disagreeable, or in certain cases even dangerous results.

Plate II is a series of drawings of the different stages of one of our most deadly toadstools, *Amanita phalloides*. It is a beautiful plant, tall and white and very attractive, but showing all danger signs.

Figure 1 is the young or button stage, partly above and partly below ground. Figure 2 is a section cut lengthwise through the same and having the various parts labeled. The gills are attached to the stem or stipe by the veil, and the whole is enclosed in a sort of shell or volva.

Figure 3 is the young, which by its elongation has burst the enclosing shell or volva, the wing part of it behind as a cup and the rest on top of the pileus as patches.

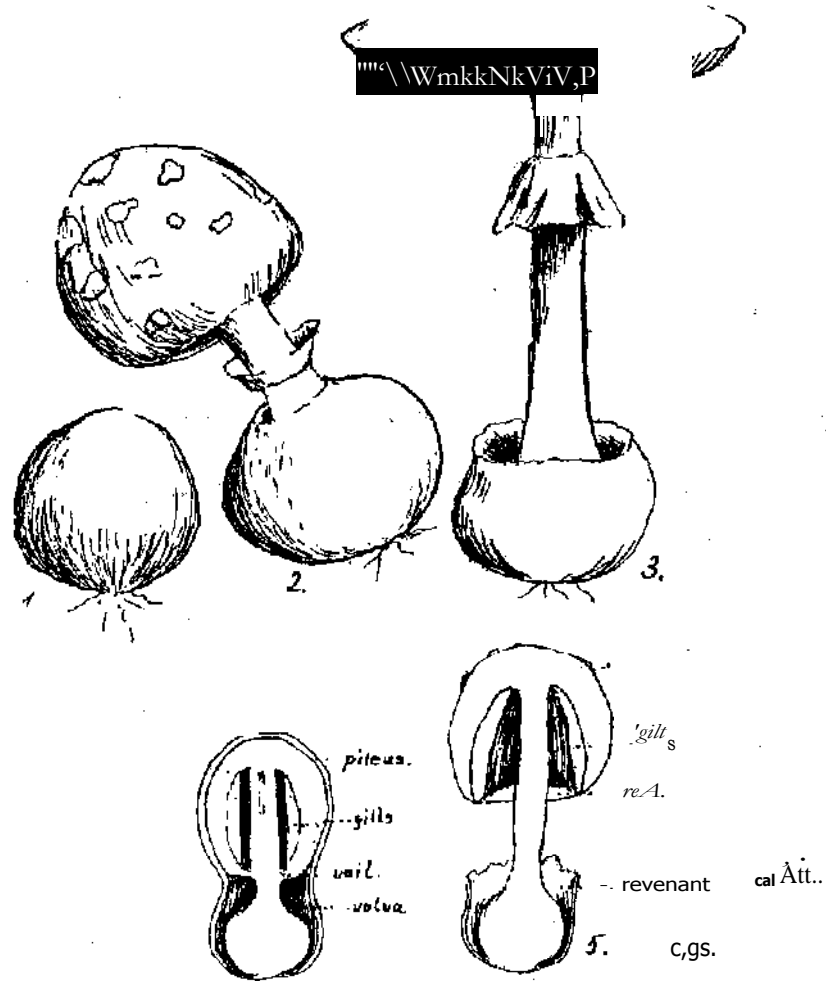
The gills are still attached to the stipe. Figure 4 is a longitudinal section of the same.

Figure 5 is a mature plant. The lifting of the cap has left the broken veil behind as a ring. The gills and spores are white. The cap of another fungus, has a range of colors from a cream through brilliant yellow to black. The cup is not well marked.

The fact that there are members of this group which are not deadly, and of absolute safety they are to be shunned. These are the dangerous ones, more or less below the ground, making it imperative always to pick

the whole plant when gathering mushrooms; a veil or ring on the stem, and scales or patches on the cap. Too much weight must not be attached to these last characteristics; and whenever a cup is present, discard the plant no matter whatever other signs may or may not be present.

On the contrary the absence of the danger signs will not warrant a feeling of safety in the use of any sort as a food. As was said in the beginning, so let us repeat emphatically that there is no universal test, **LEARN TO KNOW A FEW WELL MARKED FORMS THAT ARE SAFE AND BE SATISFIED TO CONFINE YOUR EATING TO THEM.**



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