

### IDEAS OF POISONS

Until a century or two ago most people believed in witches and the so-called "black art" which they were supposed to practice. Everything that happened was attributed to the mysterious power of some witch unless it was obviously due to some familiar natural cause. Witches, it was understood, were in league with the devil and through the co-operation of the latter they worked all manner of evil in the most subtle, insidious ways. They were supposed to possess the power to look into the future, to recall the past and to communicate at will with departed spirits. Naturally, therefore, everyone feared and dreaded them.

It was commonly believed that they learned from the evil one formulas and recipes for the preparation of various concoctions each of which, according to its nature, was capable of bringing about certain extraordinary mental or physical conditions, of governing the affections, inducing special kinds of dreams or causing death. Until about 200 years ago it was quite a common thing for a person with murder in his heart to consult a witch to learn how to go about the dastardly business he contemplated and to obtain a deadly poison which could be counted on to kill his victim in just the manner he desired.

One of these witches, an Italian woman named Tofana, had a reputation all over Europe for possessing peculiarly fiendish powers. She had clients from all countries and the poisons she supplied them or told them how to make, it is declared, killed no less than 600 people.

One of her favorite concoctions was known as the "aqua della Tofana." It was administered by putting six drops into wine or other beverage to be drunk by the unsuspecting victim. In most cases, it was understood, this poison would cause death through its action on the vital organs. If the victim, because of unusual resisting power or for some other reason, did not die from the poison within a short time, it was supposed to affect his mind, causing the most frightful visions to be conjured up and so shocking him to death.

Young gypsy women of tribes living in Italy and Hungary were supposed to carry a peculiarly deadly poison under their finger-nails. It was understood that they obtained this by the invocation of spirits of persons who had committed suicide. They poisoned intended victims with it by cleverly scratching them with their nails while telling their fortunes. This subtle poison was not supposed to cause death directly; it acted on the brain in such a manner as to induce gradual paralysis and create an irresistible desire to commit suicide and lead others to do likewise.

There are many things that doctors and chemists of modern times don't know but their knowledge is vast-

ly more extensive and accurate than that of their predecessors of a few centuries ago. The latter fell into numerous errors and doubtless killed more than they cured. They had various potions and filters which they believed in implicitly but which we know today absolutely worthless—or worse, positively harmful.

Shakespeare was a man of extraordinary learning, having at his fingers' ends the lore of the medical expert, the chemist, the lawyer, the merchant and almost everyone else. But, as was quite natural, of course, he knew no more than the experts in these various fields and labored under the same misapprehensions as they on some points.

It was commonly believed in those days that the effects of poisons introduced into the system through the ear were peculiarly deadly. Thus we find Shakespeare making the ghost of Hamlet's father say that Claudius poured the "juice of cursed hebenon (henbane) into the porches of his ears." The fact is, this poison could do no harm, administered in this way, because it could not possibly penetrate a sound eardrum.

The death of King Francis of France was long believed to have been due to this poison, introduced by way of his ear. It is now known, however, that he died of meningitis resulting from an inflammation of the internal ear.

### AVIATOR OUTFLEW EAGLE

A British aviator was clipping along at 100 miles an hour in a scout plane, flying from Paris to Madrid, when he saw in the faint light of early dawn a big eagle soaring upward toward him from the Pyrenees. At first the man was amused to think that the bird apparently was about to give him a race but when it occurred to him that if it were evilly disposed it might attack him and make him lose control of his machine, thus causing him to fall on the rugged rocks beneath, the thing was anything but funny. Even if the eagle did not deliberately attack, he reflected, it might easily collide by accident with his machine and the results be equally unpleasant and disastrous.

The big bird rose higher and higher and at length approached within a few yards of the airplane. The aviator throttled down his engine and flew at about the same rate as the eagle and they skimmed along side by side, each studying the other and trying to divine his purpose. At length the eagle began circling and rose higher and higher above the machine. The aviator started up after him and then suddenly opening his throttle, turned the nose of the machine down and looped right over the bird.

Down shot the eagle, using every ounce of his strength to catch up. Apparently he had bitten off considerably more than he could chew for within a short time his strength failed perceptibly, then his wings gave a final feeble flap and he nose-dived earthward, for all the world like a shot and disabled airplane. The bird-man followed close after him to ascertain the outcome and at length saw him flatten out and effect a landing in the foothills, evidently completely done up.