

## POISON FOR BEAUTY

FOR some poisons individuals can work up a tolerance by gradually increasing the dosage until they are able to take without apparent ill effect quantities far larger than the lethal dose for the average person. In the province of Styria in Austria it is said that a large proportion of the population are what are termed "arsenic eaters." It is a form of drug addiction: these people eat the white powder, arsenic trioxide, because it gives them a feeling of well-being, an exaggerated degree of physical stamina and resistance to fatigue.

The big trouble is that, once a person becomes an arsenic eater, he can never stop the habit. To do so brings a rapid decline in health, leading inevitably to death. In Styria the peasants start feeding arsenic to nursing infants, gradually increasing the dose as the child grows up. One striking effect of arsenic on both humans and animals is that, if given within the individual's tolerance, it causes the development of great physical beauty. It is said that the girls in Styria are more beautiful than

others anywhere in Europe. These people in Styria have been eating arsenic for generations—no one knows how long—and appear to have developed an unusual tolerance, as a race, for the poison.

For the average person, arsenic is a violent and deadly poison. About two-tenths of a gram is sufficient to kill most people when conditions are right, whereas the adult Styria addict can eat as much as *three* grams without ill effect. Of course, the Austrian government tried to put down the practice, but without marked success. The arsenic oxide is sold from house to house by "bootleggers" in the form of cream-colored paste looking somewhat like cottage cheese. The peasants spread it on bread and eat it as they would butter.

For many centuries the countryside of Styria has abounded with iron smelters, using an iron ore that contains an unusual amount of arsenic as an impurity. In the smelting process the arsenic goes out of the smokestack in the form of the light powder, arsenic tri-

xide. The wind blows it over the neighboring country, and sometimes the pastures where the horses graze are visibly coated with a thin layer of the dust.

The speculation is that some time, long ago, a peasant who was rather more astute than his fellows noticed that the horses grazing in pastures sprinkled with the white dust were more beautiful, stronger, and had glossier coats and were generally more satisfactory animals than those grazing on other pastures. He must have reasoned on

the correct assumption that it was the white powder that made the horses so fine (race-horses are "doped" sometimes with arsenic before a race to give them greater speed), that what was good for horses might be good for men. So he collected some of the dust and tried it on himself, with the results that he had anticipated. That might have been the beginning of the arsenic-eating in Styria.—*From The Doctor Looks at Murder, by M. Edward Marten and Norman Cross.*

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### *THOSE ROMAN EMPERORS!*

CALIGULA, the third ruler of Rome, declared himself God so that he might enter the sacred temples and seduce the virginal female vestals, who were similar to our modern nuns. Caligula made his favorite horse a priest, and gave it a marble palace, plus furniture and slaves.

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CLAUDIUS, who next ascended the throne, was so absent-minded that when he had his wife killed for adultery, he forgot about it, and the following evening asked his servants why she didn't appear for dinner.