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[McIlvaine On Mushrooms](#)441

One of the first mushroom books I bought over twenty years ago was a Dover paperback reprint of Charles McIlvaine's classic guide, *One Thousand American Fungi*. This book was first published as a subscription-only work in the year 1900. It naturally has been superseded from a scientific and taxonomical point of view by many excellent recent fungus publications, but the book retains a certain charm all its own.

McIlvaine was an amateur mycologist who became intrigued by the huge variety of mushrooms he encountered riding horseback in the mountains of West Virginia. He ate many species of fungi only to find that certain European authorities had classified several as poisonous. His book definitely shouldn't be used these days as an authority on the edibility of mushroom species! The man seemed to have an iron constitution!

His book is illustrated with line drawings and charmingly amateurish paintings, most of them contrived group portraits of many species. I borrowed several of them to illustrate my story which appeared here a few days ago, **World Fungus Conclave**.

Allow me to quote from the introduction to the book:

Scores of species of fungi were found in the forests, ravines, and clearings of the West Virginia mountains from 1881 to 1885 inclusive, and eaten by the writer before he had the opportunity to learn their names from books or obtain the assistance of experts in identifying them. He knew the individuals without knowing their names, as one knows the bird song and plumage before formal introduction to the pretty creatures which charm him.

After he was able to get European publications on the subject, and by their aid trace the species he had eaten to their names, descriptions and qualities, he was surprised to learn that many of them were warned against as deadly. As informed by these books, he properly ought to have died several times. It soon became evident that these authors had followed one another in condemning species, some because they bore brilliant hues, others because they were unpleasant when raw (just as is a potato), rather than investigate their qualities by testing them. Here was a realm of food-giving plants almost entirely unexplored. The writer determined to explore it. Instead of the one hundred and eleven species then recorded by the late Doctor Curtis as edible, my number of edible species now exceeds his by over six hundred.

A brave man indeed! Needless to say the modern amateur mycologist should turn to books like David Arora's excellent **Mushrooms Demystified** as a guide to edibility.

I can't resist reproducing one more of McIlvaine's charming paintings:





Grouped by F. D. Briscoe - Studies by C. McIlvaine.

PLATE X.

FIG	PAGE.	FIG.	PAGE.
1. AMANITOPSIS VAGINATA,	28	5. MYCENA GALERICULATA,	127
2. AMANITOPSIS VAGINATA, VAR. LIVIDA,	29	6. MYCENA PROLIFERA,	126
3. AMANITOPSIS NIVALIS,	29	7. MYCENA PROLIFERA,	126
4. AMANITOPSIS STRANGI,	29		

3. AMANITOPSIS VAGINATA, VAR. LIVIDA,
4. AMANITOPSIS NIVALIS,
4. AMANITOPSIS STRANGULATA,

28
29
29
30

5. MYCENA GALERICULATA,
6. MYCENA PROLIFERA,
7. MYCENA PROLIFERA (SECTION),

127
126
126

Larry

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