



OUT IN THE OPEN

By TUBBY TOMS

Indiana Native Food

Take it from no less an authority than J. O. Cottingham, noted student of fungi, right now is the high tide of the year for edible mushrooms. Whereas most of us think about mushrooms in terms of the spring morel, or sponge mushroom, and the field mushroom come autumn, the man who knows best says otherwise. Perhaps he ought to know, having found right here in Marion County and classified 192 different species in 1947 and added 45 more to the list this year.

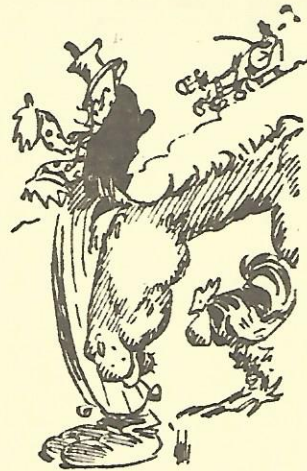
Yesterday Mr. Cottingham brought in a whole sackful of specimens, part of a bushel he had just found north of the city. First he showed me a huge one which he described, and quite aptly, as the oyster shell, which grows on the sides of trees and stumps in great profusion. A small one, 4 or 5 inches in diameter, looks like nothing more than an oyster shell with scalloped edges. This is one of the many varieties that Mr. Cottingham dries out in his basement against the time when the weather makes mushroom-hunting just a little too rugged. When the time comes that he feels an appetite for fried mushrooms, he takes a few, soaks them a few hours and they become as fresh as they were when first gathered.

Well, having seen and passed up literally tons of oyster shell mushrooms in the past, I could have kicked myself when Mr. Cottingham said they rated in the "wonderful" class for the table and that there was no mistaking of this type of mushroom for the poisonous or nonedible classes. So I'm passing his information on to some of you hunters who aren't coming home with the game and have some explaining to do to the good wife. Now you have the word of an expert, Mr. Cottingham, that the oyster shells

Nor did Mr. Cottingham stop on acquainting this writer with the big oyster shell type. Another he showed me was what is known as the brick top hypophoma, which resembles somewhat an umbrella mushroom, that has been caught in the wind and thrown slightly in reverse. Its cover is exactly what the name implies, like common building brick. The gills underneath are spaced a little bit farther apart than those of the field mushroom. It is highly regarded by mushroom fanciers and, Mr. Cottingham says, not easily confused with any other varieties. What scares me is that Latin name, but Mr. Cottingham offered considerable reassurance by explaining that he had found only one outright poisonous variety in the county this year.

Still another variety he described as the honey-colored armillaria, also the umbrella type. The top, as the name suggests, is close to that of dark honey. Again the Latin name frightens me, but he says there's no risk involved in eating them. And the fourth type he brought in is a tiny cluster of thin-stemmed, orange-colored buttons known as the velvet-stemmed collybia. These, he says, appear most frequently around the bases of stumps.

Now, as I said earlier, Mr. Cottingham brought in a large sack of these dainties of the world and insisted that we eat them. He suggested frying them in bacon grease for breakfast, or, if we wanted to be really fastidious, cook them to a golden brown in a 50-50 mixture of butter and lard. We will follow his instructions to the letter and if this column appears Monday, as usual, you'll know that we really enjoyed them. After all, doesn't Mr. Cottingham lecture regularly on mushrooms before the Indiana Academy of Science, the



ABE MARTIN

Next to hat store lookin' glasses nothing's so effective as a wedge o' mince pie in takin' the conceit out of people who feel as young as they ever did. The radio is a wonderful contraption for isolated folks who've been shuckin' corn an' milkin' all day, but the jokes take us back so fer.

venture too far away from the facts of science?

Winding up his explanation to this rank layman in the subject, Mr. Cottingham leaned back, smiled a sign and said:

"Now and then I find a specimen that stumps me. When that happens I take no chances. I send them to some university for identification. Oh, you know, there's simply no end to it: the field is hnutless.

"Once in a while you'll cook up some mushrooms and find them a little tough. Well, isn't beefsteak tough sometimes, too?"

Oh, well, it's easy to make a mistake in the field of any living thing. For instance, Robbie Robinson, The News cartoonist, hands me a newspaper clipping from a paper in Weiser, Idaho. An Indiana elk hunter was checking out at a game warden station and reported one elk to his credit. The warden was a little dubious on noting that a protruding hoof had a shoe on it. When he lifted the cover what he saw was not an elk but a burro, skinned and cut up in the approved manner. No