

Opening

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The title of this Symposium, "Symposium on Edible Fungi", expresses that our main interest during these three days will be the higher fungi as human food.

Obviously fungi have been a part of the human diet for hundreds of centuries. Unquestionably by the system of trial and error the human species accumulated a body of knowledge concerning those fungi that are edible and those that are not. Written documents from Ancient Greek and Roman times show that fungi were eaten there more often as food than as a rare delicacy. Furthermore, the Romans were in possession of knowledge concerning poisonous fungi and some of them are reputed to have used poisonous fungi to eliminate "persona non grata" from their environment. After those Roman times, especially during the last two or three centuries since Carl von Linné and Justus Liebig, biological sciences have accumulated an overwhelming store of knowledge in every area concerning plants, and in this century even concerning their food value and their potential as food source. However, when comparing the store of knowledge concerning green plants with that concerning mushrooms, fungi, it is easy to see that, so far, fungi have not been as attractive a subject for research as green plants or even micro-organisms have been.

What has been the reason for the lack of interest in fungi? I have read an explanation somewhere. Carl von Linné's plant systematics was accepted in Botany for more than a century ago and in this systematics there is no place for fungi. I am not a botanist or a mycologist, so that I am not capable of considering how much different the position of mycology would be to-day if Linné had put more emphasis on fungi. Whatever the reason may be, we can observe an evident lack of interest in mycology for instance in our country. We have at our universities about twenty professorship in pure or applied botany. However, fungi are not mentioned in the definitions of the field of any of these professorships. The inadequate knowledge of our mushrooms and the insufficient training of mycologists has become obvious when interest in the economic utilization of fungi has increased in this country in recent years. I will only refer to the increasing number of fungus poisonings.

It seems to me that the situation is not very much different elsewhere in the world. As evidence for this, may I refer to Dr. Kurtzman in the United States who says: "It is ironic that the United States has shipped large quantities of milk to developing nations to relieve their protein deficiency when those countries could have been taught to grow mushrooms and produce a continued supply of protein."

Interest in mushrooms as a natural resource and as food supply has been increasing in our country during this decade. The need for research on fungi has become obvious. The Academy of Finland supports a three-year research project concerning the economic utilization of fungi. The present symposium has been arranged by this group of scientists. The goals of this project are:

- to estimate the crop of wild-growing fungi in our country
- to develop modern technology for processing them
- to investigate and develop methods of cultivation of new species
- to study the nutritional value of fungi.

This is the second year of this research project. When we began to study the literature we noticed that forest mushrooms have not been a very popular topic in food science in the western countries. Very soon we understood that we urgently need closer contacts with the scientists in those countries in Europe where the eating of fungi is a tradition and where research on them has been carried out for years, i.e. to the countries of Eastern Europe. Since we started this research we have made efforts to find an opportunity to create contacts with the research institutes and scientists as well as with the people working with production, distribution and technology of fungi in your countries. The agreements on economical, industrial and scientific-technical co-operation between our countries as well as the agreements on cultural exchange between Academies provide us the opportunity. This Symposium is the first step on creating the contacts. This is the first step, but I hope not the only one. I am convinced that the importance of mushrooms will continuously increase both from the nutritional point of view and as a means of solving envi-

ronmental waste problems. It means that the need of contacts and co-operation between scientists will continue and increase. Therefore I propose for consideration whether this kind of symposium could be arranged in turn by the participating countries, for instance every second year.

Our honoured guests! We are very happy when we succeeded in getting you to participate in this Sym-

posium and to visit us. I enjoy the interest our Swedish colleagues have shown in the Symposium. I am greatly delighted to see this great number of Finnish participants, too.

I open this Symposium by wishing all of you welcome and hoping that these days will meet in some way everyone's expectations and that you will also enjoy these days.