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Book Reviews: Popular Books Section

[Page 2 - Excerpts Section (*The Elements of Murder - A History of Poison*)]

HIGHLY ENTERTAINING, VERY READABLE AND QUITE INSTRUCTIVE

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The Elements of Murder - A History of Poison *by* John Emsley. Hardcover, 6" x 9". Oxford University Press, 198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016 U.S.A., . Publication Date 2005. xiv + 421 pages, ISBN 0-19-280599-1. Price $30.00, £18.99

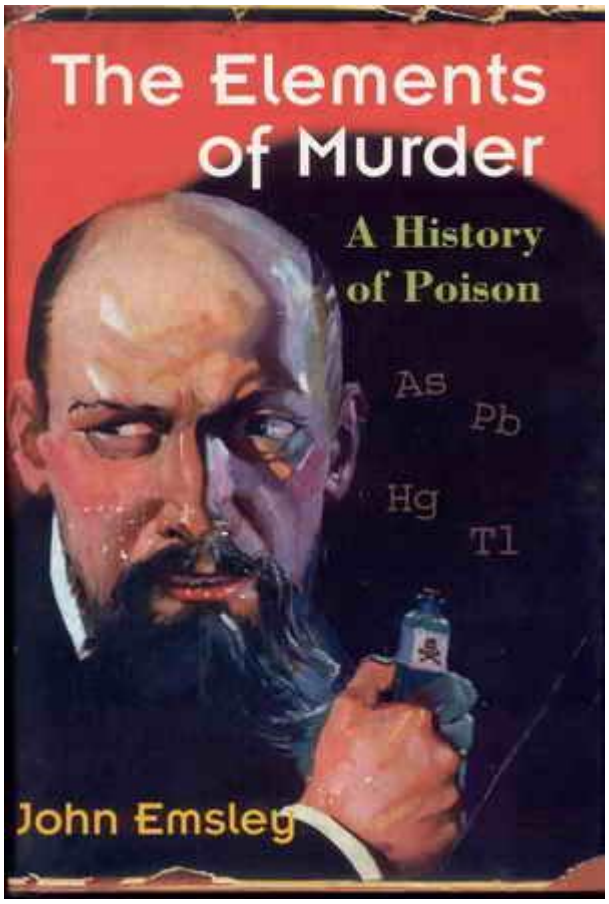
Official site of this book: http://www.oup.com/us/catalog/general/subject/Chemistry/?view=usa&ci=0192805991

Personal website of John Emsley: http://www.ch.cam.ac.uk/staff/je.html

Listen to an interview with John Emsley: http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4769877

Write an Email to John Emsley: JohnEmsley38@aol.com

Please the linked page (page002ex) to read excerpts from this book.



Please the linked page (page002 quiz) to solve an interesting quiz based on this book.

Please the linked page (emsley) to read an exclusive interview with the author John Emsley conducted by the editor-in-chief of this journal.

This extraordinary book gives information on virtually every metallic poison that humanity knows of. And what wonderful information! The book would keep you engrossed for endless hours. What makes the book unique is that the information present here is not easily available elsewhere.

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The editors at the journal office decided to give some excerpts from this book, to give the reader some idea of the range of ideas discussed. Here is what the author have to describe about the famed arsenic eaters and *hittrichfeitl* (pages 102-103)

The arsenic-eaters

Pages 102-103

In the 1800s it was rumoured that the peasants of the Styrian Alps, near Graz on the border between Austria and Hungary, consumed arsenic trioxide as a tonic and in more than lethal doses. To many it seemed inconceivable, and doctors generally disbelieved such tales despite assurances from their colleagues in the Graz region that they really were true. The men ate arsenic to help them to breathe better at high altitudes, while the women ate it to make them plumper - a desirable female feature in those days - and to give them fresh complexions. (It did indeed result in a rosy cheeked com¬plexion - regarded as a sign of good health - because it damaged the blood vessels in the surface of the skin.) The men also claimed it gave them more

energy, aided digestion, prevented disease, made them more courageous, and increased their sexual potency.

It appears that the Styrian peasants first developed a taste for arsenic in the 1600s when mining began in the region. They got the arsenic trioxide from the chimneys of the small huts in which minerals were smelted and from which fumes of white arsenic were often observed to be emitted. Their name for the arsenic was hittrichfeitl referring to the white smoke, and they ate the arsenic trioxide like salt, sprinkling it on bread and bacon.

The arsenic-eaters were brought to public notice by a Dr Von Tschudi in 1851 who wrote about them in a medical magazine. This was repeated by Charles Boner in Chambers' Edinburgh Journal and was so sensational that it was reproduced in more than 30 other journals around the world. It received even more publicity when J.F.W. Johnston wrote about it in his book The Chemistry of Modern Life published in 1855 and even got academic acceptance when Professor Henry Roscoe spoke about it at the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society in 1860 and included it in the influential textbook Treatise on Chemistry which he co-authored with Carl Schorlemmer in 1877.

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The Elements of Murder - A History of Poison

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