

THE POISONOUS PRIMULA

By Newlin Williams

WITHIN the past few years a dainty and delicate traitor has been brought to light in the shape of the greenhouse Primula. This plant, in virtue of its easy cultivation, the delicate tint and clarity of its blossoms, and the beauty of its long-stemmed, crisp leaves, has of late become the pet of every



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window gardener. It is what I have heard called a "thankful little plant," blooming on and on with the simple demands of sun and water. Ten or twelve years ago a scientific journal published a paper on the poisonous properties of the Primula, but the warning was not widely spread, as probably the plant was not so generally known at the time. Lately I find that the more conscientious florists have desisted from its culture, owing to the disfiguring, not to say painful, recurring eruptions it causes on the bodies of those susceptible persons who venture upon familiarities with it.

Its true character was first brought to my notice by an artist friend, who, after sketching the plant in blossom, broke a leaf from it to crush and smell for the sake of the pleasant Geranium-like odor it exhaled. Soon after her face and arms were covered with an eruption like that caused by Poison Ivy. The pink and delicate little plant was immediately suspected, and was, after a struggle, consigned, pot and all, to the dark waters of the river. I know of many cases of serious poisoning which may be traced to the Primula, enough and more to fully justify the evil reputation it has gained.

Though the fact is well established that all persons are not susceptible to its poison, there will probably be some member of the family who will suffer by coming in contact with the leaves or stem of the Primula. The effects of the poison of this plant are positive, and are of too serious a nature to warrant its presence in the home.

It will be noticed that the plant is covered with translucent hairs. Other than these visible structures are a set of smaller ones scarcely discernible under a powerful pocket glass, and bearing about the same relation to the larger set as do the Alders and spice bushes in an open grove to the tall Oaks and Tulips above them. Under a high magnification the glandular structure of the hairs is apparent, the short set of three segments, the long set of ten or so, each tipped with a drop of viscid amber-colored secretion. In passing the section through stain, alcohol and oil of cloves, this terminal viscid globule is dissolved away and leaves a shallow cup distinctly visible after staining.

It is easy to see how this secretion being held at the tip of the bristles might cling, when fresh, to any skin that came in contact with it, and be absorbed into the circulation of those with especially thin and susceptible epidermis.