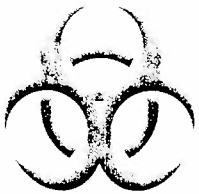


Death Dealing Doctor

[illegible]	New York, USA
[illegible]	January–March 1916
[illegible]	Dr. Arthur Waite
[illegible]	Mr. and Mrs. John Peck
[illegible]	germs and poison
[illegible]	toxicology

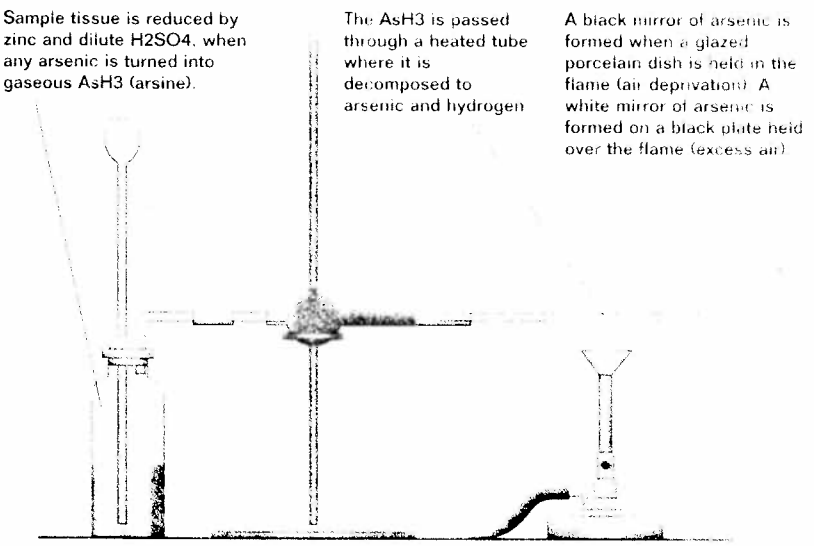
The Crime

When the body of a possible murder victim is given a post-mortem to determine the cause of death, one of the first signs examiners look for is the presence of any known poisons. But what happens when the lethal ingredients that led to the victim's demise are not chemical poisons, but germs spread by diseases, some of which can prove fatal through natural misfortune rather than murderous intent? If a murderer could harness these germs and bacteria as an effective murder weapon, how could investigators possibly determine whether a victim had died from natural causes or purposefully been exposed to the deadly germs by a human assailant?

This was the line of thought that influenced Dr. Arthur Warren Waite, a dentist in New York who shared his luxury apartment on Riverside Drive with his wife's retired parents. His father-in-law, John Peck, had built up a sizeable fortune after a career as a pharmacist in the Middle West, and Waite longed to inherit as much of the money as possible. The problem was that neither parent seemed in poor health, but it occurred to Waite that it might be possible to give nature a helping hand, by causing Peck to ingest harmful bacteria which would trigger an entirely convincing onset of a serious disease, followed by a severe physical decline and ultimate death, without anyone being held responsible.

The Case

Waite began by setting his sights on John Peck's wife. He carefully isolated a mixture of diphtheria and influenza germs, and added these to her food. After a series of doses, the elderly woman became ill, and her condition steadily



Above Demonstration of Marsh's test for arsenic, developed in the 1820s, before which the odorless poison was untraceable in the human body.

deteriorated, until she finally died in January 1916. Waite then shifted his efforts to her husband, but his method did not work so effectively on his second target. It seemed John Peck's constitution was disconcertingly immune to a whole range of nasty bugs, and every weapon in Waite's locker was proving ineffective.

First he tried the diphtheria mixture, with no results. Then he prescribed a nasal spray to aid his victim's breathing, which he had contaminated with tuberculosis germs, but even this failed to produce the planned result. He tried influenza and typhoid, but still the old man remained obstinately healthy. Finally, Waite's impatience overcame all the care and caution he had taken so far in his efforts. Determined to hasten his father-in-law's death, he added a dose of what he described to their family servant simply as "medicine" to tea and soup served to Peck one evening. The "medicine" did

exactly what he hoped it would do. A man who appeared to the family doctor as healthy only the day before died on March 12, 1916, just two months after his late wife.

The Evidence

The medicine administered to the unfortunate John Peck was nothing less than a lethal dose of arsenic. Unluckily for the devious dentist, there was a reliable test for the presence of this poison which had been developed by James Marsh, a London chemist, in the 1820s, and this was well known to the investigators. The first step of the test is to place tissue samples from the victim, together with any stomach contents, on to a zinc plate. Then sulphuric acid is poured on to the plate, and in the ensuing reaction any arsenic present in either tissue or stomach contents absorbs the hydrogen from the acid and is given off as a gas. This is collected and passed down a heated tube and then allowed to cool, where the mixture forms white crystals of arsenious oxide. When samples were taken from John Peck's body, the crystals showed exactly what Dr. Warren Waite had turned to in his haste to be rid of his father-in-law.

The Outcome

With evidence as clear as this, the trial was something of a formality. Dr. Arthur Warren Waite was convicted of John Peck's murder, and before his execution he admitted the ingenious and successful methods he had used for poisoning his mother-in-law without incurring any suspicion at all. Had he persevered with these ideas, in time Mr.Peck may have suffered the same fate as his wife without anyone being the wiser.

1. Why do doctors make good murderers (particularly with poisons)?

2. What did the doctor use in his first attempt to murder his father-in-law?

3. What did he use for his second (ultimately effective) attempt?

4. The poison used in this case was also known as "inheritance powder." Why?

5. What is the name of the test used to detect this poison?