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Police Science Technical Abstracts and Notes

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POLICE SCIENCE TECHNICAL ABSTRACTS AND NOTES

M. Edwin O'Neill

Botanical Evidence in Accident Investigation

Of all the evidentiary materials which are recovered from automobiles involved in accidents, fragments of plant origin have perhaps received the least attention. In many instances, however, fragments of leaves, twigs, mosses, and other plant materials have played an important part in the investigation of accident cases. Many plant fragments possess distinctive characteristics by which they can be identified as to species. Moreover, plants of different kinds show "preferences" for particular localities or habitats and this tendency may be useful in connecting the suspected automobile with the scene of the accident. A case illustrating the practical value of botanical evidence is described in an article which appeared in the July-September, 1940 issue of *The Police Journal* (London),¹ The author, Inspector F. J. Betteridge of the Wiltshire Constabulary, describes in detail the investigation of an accident in which a car was driven off the edge of a road, killing a pedestrian and seriously injuring the two occupants of the car. In the course of the investigation witnesses re-

ported that shortly before the accident a car of similar appearance, driven at high speed, had run off the road at a point about a mile from the scene of the accident in question. This aspect of the case was thoroughly investigated, for, as the author states, "It was realized that provided that it could be proved that the car involved in the incidents at Stoford and at Stapleford were one and the same car, this evidence would be of greatest importance in assessing the responsibility of the driver for the fatality." Examination of the car disclosed a quantity of leaves and soil. Samples of leaves and soil from both places were also obtained and submitted to the police laboratory for comparison. The leaves from the car were found to be from plants of the type found at Stoford, but unlike those from the scene of the accident at Stapleford. Because of the fact that all of the leaves from a number of different plants were of the same type, the possibility of the car having picked up the leaves at some third site was considered as "stretching coincidence rather too far."

The Florence Test

An interesting discussion of the use of the Florence test in the examination of seminal fluid is contained in the *Indian Medical Gazette*² of November, 1939. The author, Dr. K. N. Bagchi, reports the results of numerous experiments with the Florence reaction, and states that whereas a negative test has no medico-legal value, a positive test "may be safely taken as an indication of the presence of seminal fluid." Various materials likely to be found on clothing such as pus, blood, faeces, etc.,

were tested and in no case was a positive reaction obtained. According to the author, the basis of the test is the fact that iodine in potassium iodide precipitates free choline as a periodide, and that semen is the only biological material containing free choline in a large quantity. (A similar study upon this subject was reported in a technical abstract which appeared in vol. 31, No. 1, May-June, 1940 issue of this *Journal* at page 122.)

¹ Betteridge, F. J., "Botanical Evidence in a Motor Accident Case." *The Police Journal* 13 (3):334-339 (1940).

² Bagchi, K. N., "The Florence test in the

medicolegal investigation of seminal fluid." *Indian Medical Gazette* 74:683 (1939). Abstracted in *Medico-Legal and Criminological Review* 8:220 (July, 1940).