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Discovers Secret

(By N. C. W. C. News Service)
Washington, D. C.—What is believed to be a rediscovery of the preservative with which the ancient Egyptians mummified the bodies of their dead, has been made by Francis S. Benenati, who received a master's degree from the Catholic University last month. The results of numerous tests of the fluid, which Mr. Benenati calls "Balsam San Rocco," have aroused the interest of biologists and other scientists throughout the world.

These experiments with the balsam during the last two years have demonstrated its complete efficacy in preserving animal tissues, especially the human brain, and promise a very wide use of the substance in commercial as well as scientific directions.

Dr. R. W. Shufeldt, a well known naturalist and biologist, who is in charge of a section of the Army Medical Museum in Washington during the war, regards the balsam as most valuable in preserving the human brain and other organs for pathological purposes. Professor C. Judson Herrick, editor of the Journal of Neurology, and Professor N. D. C. Lewis, share Dr. Shufeldt's opinion. Professor Herrick was chief of the Section of Pathology of the Army Museum.

Dr. Shufeldt's Testimony
In an article contributed to the Medico-Legal Journal, Dr. Shufeldt tells of the experiments which he and his associates in the Army Museum made with the balsam and declares that "this is surely a very remarkable discovery, and its value to alienists, medico-legalists, coroners, undertakers, anatomists, collectors and a great many others, goes without saying."

Describing one important experiment, Dr. Shufeldt, in the same article says: "Dr. Herrick and I saw the inventor of this balsam take a small piece of fresh human brain and place it in about one fluid ounce of the liquid, allowing it to remain there under lock and key about two whole days. Upon removing the piece of brain it was rinsed off in clear water and allowed to dry, and in forty-eight hours or so the specimen was much shrunken, very dark and as hard as a piece of wood. At this stage one would say that the sample was absolutely worthless for any purposes whatever. The inventor took this unpromising looking piece of withered material and placed it in clear water for a sufficient length of time, when, to the surprise of everyone, it swelled up to its normal size and appearance."

"Sections for the microscope were made of it, and these duly stained. Microscopical examination followed. It was not only found that the tissue showed the staining most beautifully, but what was far more remarkable, all the cerebral histological structures were perfect—cellular and otherwise."

Preserves Bodies Indefinitely
Dr. Shufeldt points out the importance of the balsam in preserving the bodies or organs of persons who have been murdered or whose lives have been taken by any means whatever, as by poison, bullet, knife, strangulation or a blow. The body could be mummified indefinitely and thus remain in evidence.

In addition to its worth to scientists and investigators, the balsam promises to have commercial uses of the utmost significance. Tests now being made indicate that the fluid will probably afford a means of preserving eggs for long periods under ordinary conditions of storage and without recourse to refrigeration or special packing.

One of the experiments which seemed to prove the efficacy of the fluid was described to a representative of the N. C. W. C. News Service. Several eggs were submerged in the fluid for short periods and then removed. They were kept under ordinary conditions of temperature for more than six months. Two of the eggs were then poached in the same vessel with two eggs freshly laid. The person to whom the eggs were served distinguished no difference of any sort between those which were "preserved" and those which were "fresh."

Chinese Beetles Restored
While tests of fluid were being made at the Catholic University its usefulness in restoring and preserving zoological specimens was effectively exhibited. Among the valuable collections in the museum of the university is one of Chinese beetles. Some of the specimens were showing signs of disintegration and discoloration. One was experimentally treated with the balsam. Almost at once the brilliant markings on the beetle's back were renewed and the process of disintegration was arrested.

Frogs and fish have been successfully preserved for more than a year without signs of decay. It is expected that they can be preserved indefinitely. When removed from the fluid they become quite dry and "leathery" to the sight and touch, but are made life-like again on being immersed in clear water for about twenty-four hours.

"Any of the vertebrate, quite irrespective of size, when properly preserved through the use of the fluid and dried, are never thereafter affected by extreme heat or cold, or by any of the varying atmospheric conditions," says Dr. Shufeldt.

A human body was immersed in the balsam last February, twelve days after death, and under unfavorable conditions, is now in the laboratory of Tufts College, Boston, quite thoroughly preserved and showing no tendency to decomposition.

Brings Out Old Manuscripts
Besides these triumphs, the balsam has been used with success also in restoring ancient manuscripts. Several such manuscripts in the J. P. Morgan collection in New York were wholly illegible until treated with Mr. Benenati's preparation. The parchments were not only greatly improved by the process, but were capable of being read for the first time probably in hundreds of years.

The "Balsam San Rocco" is of a deep amber color, with a peculiar odor somewhat suggestive of onion. It has a fluidity about equal to that of water. Its active principle is the oil of allium, extracted by a special process from any of the plants of the onion family. The formula is, of course, Mr. Benenati's secret. The balsam is not only not poisonous, but is believed by its inventor to have some medicinal properties.

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