

Medicine and the Law

Doctor kills, dismembers wife and maid

Forensic pathologists carefully sorted out the 70 different body parts and concluded that they belonged to two distinct persons, both females.

BY DR SYLVESTER ONZIVUA

On September 29, 1935, a young woman taking a morning walk noticed a bundle jammed between some rocks in a stream. She was shocked to see what appeared to be a human hand sticking out of it.

She called the police who were to discover two human heads on the banks of the stream as well as four other bundles of human remains. The body parts were thigh bones, legs, pieces of flesh and an armless torso. A newspaper dated September 15, 1935, was used for wrapping some of the body parts.

The body parts were sent to the anatomy department of a nearby university where two eminent forensic pathologists examined the 70 different body parts. The forensic pathologists carefully sorted out the pieces and concluded that the pieces belonged to two distinct persons, both females, one six inches shorter than the other. The body of the taller person was almost complete, while the torso of the smaller person was missing.

From the way the bodies had been dismembered, it was clear that the murderer had knowledge of human anatomy and was probably a medical man. He had used a knife, and not a saw, to cut through joints and ligaments meticulously.

He had removed the skin from the face to make the faces unrecognisable, cut off the fingertips to make fingerprint

the teeth to avoid dental identification.

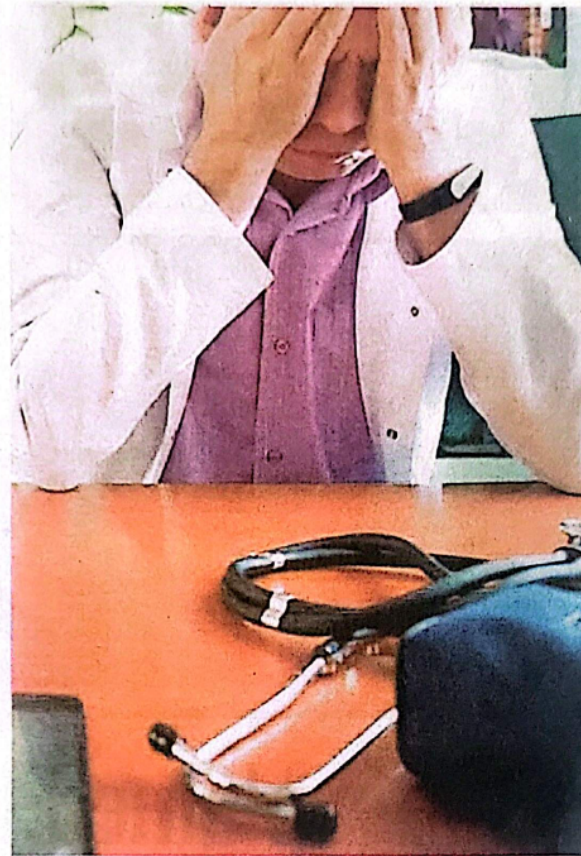
However, some scalp hair remained on the head of the smaller body, and a further search of the river yielded parts of the hands with intact finger tips. After soaking the hands in hot water, the forensic pathologists were able to get an excellent set of fingerprints.

Age estimation of the bodies was done by taking into account several features, among which were the union of the sutures of the skull, X-ray of the roots of the teeth, and union of the epiphyses of the long bones. From these, it became clear that the age of the smaller victim was around 20 years, while the other person appeared to be a middle-aged woman.

As to the cause of death, this was fairly clear; the taller woman had five stab wounds to the chest, several broken bones, and some bruises. The hyoid bone in the neck was fractured, indicating strangulation before the other injuries had been inflicted. As to the other body, the signs were that she had been battered with some blunt object.

The newspaper in which some of the body parts were wrapped was a special local edition for a particular city, and the police were drawn to believe the suspect was from this particular area and, in particular, someone with medical training. Suspicion fell on a small, rather good-looking doctor. He had reported to police the disappearance of his wife, and this was five days before the remains were discovered.

The doctor further alleged that their maid at home had gotten pregnant by



The doctor was pathologically jealous and constantly suspected his wife was unfaithful. PHOTO/REUTERS

TRouble IN PARADISE

The doctor was pathologically jealous and constantly suspected his wife was unfaithful. Their married life had long been a stormy one, and the doctor's wife had even filed a police complaint a few years prior to the murder, alleging her husband was beating her.

taken her somewhere for an abortion, since she was also missing. The police

The next morning, the servant found the doctor's house in a state of chaos, with carpets, the bath full of yellow stain, and a pile of burnt material in the yard.

A neighbour told the police that the doctor had persuaded her to come and clean up his house to prepare it for decorators, claiming he had injured his hand. She and her husband had obligingly scrubbed out the house. And the doctor had given them some bloodstained carpets and a blue suit that was also stained with blood.

On October 12, after a night of interrogation, police formally arrested the doctor and charged him with the murders of his wife and their maid. In spite of the doctor's attempts to cover his tracks, the truth about the murders had now become clear.

The doctor was pathologically jealous and constantly suspected his wife was unfaithful. Their married life had long been a stormy one, and the doctor's wife had even filed a police complaint a few years prior to the murder, alleging her husband was beating her.

A week before their disappearance, the doctor's wife and the maid had gone to visit some close friends. However, the doctor suspected that his wife was having an adulterous relationship with a friend of his, and when she returned home, the two had a violent confrontation. In a fit of jealous frenzy, the doctor strangled his wife and stabbed her repeatedly. The maid probably heard the screams of the doctor's wife and came in to investigate, whereupon she, too, was fatally assaulted by the doctor. He probably spent the following day dismembering both bodies, and that same night, travelled several miles away to dispose of the remains.

At his trial, the doctor's main line of defence was that the bodies discovered in the river were not of his wife or the maid. However, the forensic experts proved to the court's satisfaction the real identities of the deceased.

For the first time, the method of photographic superimposition was used in this case, and became a dramatic piece of forensic evidence that clinched the identity of the doctor's wife. The result was a unanimous verdict of guilty, arrived at only after one hour of deliberation. The doctor was hanged on May 12, 1936.