

LETHAL STEM CANKER OF CINCHONA

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In a survey conducted by the C. I. S. I. R. in 1978, the Cinchona trees at the Tea Research Institute, Talawakele were reported to have a very high quinine content and therefore considered suitable for future propagation work. The death of some of these trees during the past few years went unnoticed because the deaths were gradual and prolonged over a period of time. Recently the leaves of some of the trees were found to be turning red followed by defoliation and die-back of the branches leading eventually to the death of the trees.

Examination of the main stem of these defoliating trees showed the presence of longitudinal cracks on the bark starting from ground level and leading up the stem. On cutting off the bark with a knife it was found that the bark as well as the wood underneath were dead. Branches arising from the collar region showed typical longitudinal cankers, starting at the base and going up along the branch. Examination of the roots did not reveal the presence of any pathogen.

A fungus was constantly isolated from these cankers that were present on the stem. The growth of the fungus, in culture, resembles that of *Phomopsis theae*, Petch, which causes branch and collar canker in young tea. Inoculation studies are in progress to determine whether this is the causative fungus.