CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Earlier interest in coumarins arose as a result of their presence in plants having drug or perfumery value. Coumarin, the parent compound possing 2H-1-benzopyran-2-one, which has the odour of fresh mown hay, occurs in over sixty plants and its derivatives occur mainly in plants belonging to the families Umbelliferae, Rutaceae, Labiatae, Leguminosae and Orchidaceae. Some are also present in plants belonging to the families Compositae and Guttiferae. A few like novobiocin, alternariol and the aflatoxins are mould products. The only coumarins of animal origin known so far are the two benzocoumarins of castoreum, the secretion of the scent gland of the beaver. Because of the variety of their structure there has been continued interest in the study of coumarins. Some of them are interesting because of their special complex structures which could be determined only by employing special methods including the various spectral and crystallographic techniques[1].