

ranging in size up to about 5 in. long and $\frac{1}{2}$ in. to $\frac{3}{4}$ in. in width, are then packed and mailed to distributors—usually Chinese wholesale herbalists—in the United States, Canada, Fiji, and, in fact, almost anywhere in the world where there is a Chinese community large enough to sustain the trade. In pre-war years, of course, the largest market was China. But then the years have also brought a shortage in young deer horns, the real luxury, forcing the substitution of tails.

So far as is known there is only the one method of using the tail (or horn when it may be obtained) to derive the medicinal value claimed for it by thousands of years of Chinese apothecaric history, and that is as the central, though minimal, ingredient in a preparation used strictly as a tonic. Unlike the remarkable and universal healing qualities so extravagantly credited by their manufacturers to certain of our better-known coal-derivative sedatives, it is not claimed for the deer-tail compound that it cures almost all ills. To recover lost weight and pick up condition generally, yes, a deer-tail broth is just the thing.

In preparation the normal steaming method is used. Into one urn, or saucepan, is placed a fowl—not a mere chicken—and with the poultry goes a wafer of dried deer tail. This wafer is cut from the 4 in. or 5 in. length of hard, shiny, ebony, reptilian substance by a special machine originally designed to cut the horn, much the same as bacon is sliced in the grocer's shop. The saucepan is then placed within a larger vessel containing water, and the combination is steamed steadily for six or seven hours. The resultant (without the addition of this peculiar venison we would call it chicken broth) is taken as a medicine, and then for three or four weeks the patient is compelled to regard his diet with care (!). As part of the treatment he abstains from rich foods and condiments, concentrating on simple, wholesome foods.

It is reported that the effects of the chicken-deer-tail broth are near-magical. All the properties said to be contained in

the most fabulously billed of our patent medicines are available through this Chinese recipe at a much cheaper rate. Weight is restored, vitality returns; in sum, a complete debility corrective springs from the use of, and faith in, a little stumpy thing that wagged its way through many a forest glade. It is, of course, extremely doubtful that there is even remote remedial quality other than normal nutritive value in a paper-thin fragment of dried deer tail. But there is undoubtedly a value in the chicken's contribution to the medicine, in quantity at least. It must also be observed that abstinence from rich foods and the substitution of a wholly plain diet plays a major part in the magical cure. It may be, though, that suggestion contributes even more to the efficacy of the brew. The origin of the practice is lost in Chinese history, and centuries of belief can give a curative strength to such a concoction entirely independent of chemical content.

The same may be said concerning shark's fin and edible birds' nests. Our search for information on the use of deer's tails also produced assurance that the Chinese *do* eat birds' nests and that the story is not, as we had long ago begun to suspect, a myth propagated for the interest and amusement of credulous childhood. The treatment of these unusual culinary attractions is similar to that described in the case of Deer Tail *v.* Debility, except that the proportion of the two ingredients is more even: one bird's nest to one bird. The proportion of faith, it is thought, remains about the same. It must be added that the mixture (bird and nest and steam) is described as being in appearance "something like sago" and not unpalatable, particularly when garnished with chopped ham or beef.

But deer's tails or, greatly preferred, the luxurious "horn in the velvet," have preference over sharks' fins at the laundry receiving depots in Wellington, and if you go out in the deer-country with any success some portion of your expenses may be recouped by selling the tails of your kills for "1s. 6d.-3s. 6d. each, according to the size."