MUTTON BIRD OIL.

BY


As coal-liver oil is difficult to obtain in sufficient quantities it may be of interest to know that the oil extracted from the sooty petrel is not only an excellent substitute, but, in the opinion of some, more effective in the treatment of bronchitic conditions and phthisis.

The sooty petrel, which is known in New Zealand and Australia as the mutton bird, spends nine months of the year in the Antarctic, and, consequently, must be so constituted as to stand extreme degrees of cold. The birds arrive in enormous numbers at their breeding places on Stewart Island, to the south of New Zealand, and on the islands in Bass Straits. The chief islands on which they breed are Chappelo Island, Hunnooksy Island, Tin Kettle Island, and the other small islands near Finders Island and Cape Barren Island. These birds arrive on the same day every year, and depart in flocks at the end of their period of migration.

The female lays only one egg, which is hatched by the parents sitting in turn. The young birds are fed by the parents with marine life collected from far at sea. When about six weeks old, the young, which are found in burrows similar to rabbit holes, are taken by the residents and half caseas who visit these islands for the mutton bird season. The young bird is lined with as much as 8 pounds.

The birds are then gutted, salted, and smoked, and used to be sold in Tasmania and New Zealand at a retail cost of 1½d. to 2d. each, and in Sydney at 6d. each. Recently a certain number have been tunned for export; some have reached the western front, and have been much appreciated as an article of diet.

In 1900, whilst in practice in The Hutt, New Zealand, I found that Porirua and Okai, natives suffering from consumption in some cases put on flesh during a tangi, which is something akin to an Irish wake. At these times the natives consumed large quantities of mutton birds.

At Tawa Flat, where some Norwegians had settled, I induced two of the settlers, who were suffering from phthisis and did not object to the faisy taste of the mutton bird, to eat one mutton bird a day, and found after some months that there was a considerable increase in weight. I published a paper in 1900 in the Australasian Medical Gazette advocating the feeding of cases of phthisis with mutton birds. In 1910, on the west coast of Tasmania, as chief health officer, I found on the west coast of Tasmania a chemist at Zeelan who was putting up an emulsion of mutton bird oil and almond oil, which had earned a considerable reputation for the treatment of bronchitis and phthisis.

On visiting the islands in Bass Straits with the then Governor of Tasmania, Sir Harry Barron, Sir Elliott Lewis, the Premier, and other members of the Ministry and Government officials, I found that the mutton bird was one of the principal articles of diet among the residents of the islands. Later, in 1913, I was marooned on these islands for six weeks, whilst investigating an epidemic of what I diagnosed as atypical measles simulating scarlet fever, but what Dr. Wetter of the Mawson Expedition diagnosed as atypical scarlet fever simulating measles; no case of atypical fever occurred on the islands, and I found a progressive increase in weight.

On behalf of the Tasmanian Government, the Commissioner of Police, Colonel J. E. C. Lord, D.S.O., made a special report on the mutton bird industry. As a result, I understand that improved conditions have been evolved into the islands and that these birds are sufficiently protected to prevent any serious diminution in their numbers.

The supply of oil from this source is considerable and would be a valuable addition to the medicinal oils at the present time.

Another point of interest about this industry is that, until a German agent intervened, the feathers, owing to their oily state, were found to be a nuisance, but previous to the war were actually exported to Germany, where they were treated and used in the making of cushions and pillows.

Mmemoranda:

MEDICAL, SURGICAL, OBSTETRICAL.

PERICARDIAL KNOCK.

A few days before the appearance of Colonel S. Maynard Smith's article in the Journal of January 19th, p. 78, I was called to see a boy who had been accidentally shot in the head and left side of the chest when rabbiting.

About an hour before death a loud cardiac "click" developed which was synchronous with the heart systole and could be heard distinctly six or eight feet away. It bore no relation to the respiratory movements, as the inspiration was Cheyne-Stokes in character and the sound persisted during the period of apnoea. The sound of the click in the ear-piece of a telephone when the lever is...