

were addicted to the eating of human flesh, as certainly were the races of the same age on the St. John's, and as were several of the native Indian tribes of the North, of the Pacific coast, of Mexico, and of Central America.

It is clear that the motives leading different races into the custom of devouring human flesh were different. With some it was eaten as food; with some it was eaten as part of a religious ceremony; with others it was eaten by reason of superstition; and with yet others it was eaten as an act of vengeance to a fallen foe.

The practice of eating human flesh as food may have had its origin in necessity. Eaten to prevent starvation, and found to be good (as cannibals affirm it is), it may have come to be regarded as one of the regular foods. Bancroft asserts that though certain tribes of New Mexico abominated human flesh, others hunted it as game.* Yet the custom is more usual among cannibals who use only prisoners of war for food. In the *Relations of the Jesuits*, from which abundant quotations have been made, it is made clear that the Iroquois and other tribes devoured only enemies captured in battle.

The religious idea in cannibalism was most prominent among the native Mexicans. Their historian affirms that they did not feed on human flesh merely to gratify appetite, but in obedience to their religion. Bancroft acknowledges "that it is difficult to determine what religious ideas were connected with the almost universal practice of anthropophagy. Whatever may have been the original significance of the rite, it is most probable that finally the body, the essence of which (the blood poured out upon the altar) served to regale the god, was merely regarded as the remains of a divine feast, and was therefore sacred food."† The religious motive seems to have influenced the inhabitants of Nicaragua, and, indeed, many of the Maya natives, to make a food of human flesh. The priest dismembered the body, gave the heart to the high-priest, the feet and hands to the king, the thighs to those who had captured the prisoner, the entrails to the trumpeters, and the remainder to the people.

Connected with the religious motive in cannibalism is that represented by the general term superstition. The idea was common that by devouring the flesh of a fallen foe, and by drinking his blood, the eater became possessed of his bravery. A Nootka prince told the Spaniards that the bravest captains ate human flesh before going into battle. The Hyperboreans of the Pacific coast thought that by eating their prisoners taken in

* *Native Races of the Pacific Coast*, i. pp. 560, 575, 581.

† *Bancroft's Native Races*, iii. pp. 443-4.