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CANNIBALISM IN NORTH AMERICA

Little attention has been given, either by scientists or historians, to the evidence for the existence of cannibalism among the native tribes of North America. Yet the fact, not only of its existence but of its recent existence, rests upon abundant historic and archæological proof. The Jesuit Fathers who explored Canada, the early voyagers in the West Indies, the first visitors of the Pacific coast, as well as the conquerors of Mexico, all unite in giving the most explicit testimony to the existence of aboriginal man-eating tribes. Brébeuf, who came from France as a missionary to this country in the early part of the seventeenth century, gives in his report for 1636 an account of the fate of certain prisoners taken by the Hurons. After describing the torture, he goes on to say that "if the victim has shown courage, the heart was first roasted, cut into small pieces, and given to the young men and boys to increase their courage. The body was then divided, thrown into kettles, and eaten by the assembly—the head being the portion for the chief. Many of the Hurons joined in the feast with reluctance and horror, while others took pleasure in it."* Father Hennepin, writing forty years later, also speaks of the Hurons as practicing cannibalism.

The most powerful and cruel of the Northern tribes was the Iroquois; and all testimony seems to prove that it was most addicted to the habit of eating human flesh. The Jesuit missionaries were in many cases eye-witnesses of the orgies of this people. One of their feasts, celebrating a victory over the Algonquins, is thus described by Vimont: "Some bring wood, others go in search of water, and one puts the great kettles on the fire. The butchery is near. They dismember those they are going to kill, tearing them in pieces, throwing feet and legs, arms and heads, in the pot, which they boil with as much joy as the poor captives have heart-ache in seeing their companions served as a meal to these wolves. * * * * In a word, they eat the men with as great an appetite and more joy than hunters eat a boar or a deer." †

From the evidence we possess, it appears that no tribe delighted more in human flesh as a staple article of food than the Caribs, inhabitants of one of the West Indian Islands. Peter Martyr, who visited the New World a few

* *Relations de la Nouvelle France en l'Année 1636*, p. 121.

† *Relations de la Nouvelle France en l'Année 1642*, par Vimont, p. 46.