

THE USE OF SHELLS BY THE ONTARIO INDIANS.

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NATURE makes many contributions to the wants of man, and of these shells figure quite prominently; indeed, scarcely any of the natural productions of North America have commanded more general acceptance than the many species of shells abounding on the sea-shore and in the fresh-water lakes, rivers and streams. In our own Province, of course, very few large shells were available, although the *Unios* (some with beautiful pearly interiors) were, as will be seen from what follows, utilized to some considerable extent, not only in the domestic economy of the Indians, but also in the ornamentation of their persons. The same remark will apply to the univalves as well.

Besides our native shells there are many oceanic species which have found their way hither through the channels of trade, or perhaps as reprisals in warfare. These consist principally of several varieties of conchs, the large *Busycon perversum* (figure *b*, plate xvii) especially, and other smaller species, which will be described more fully under the head of ornaments.

Although they were in common use to the south of us, there is no record of any pearls having been used by the Indians anywhere in Ontario.

I. SHELL-FISH AS FOOD.

As food is the first requirement of man, we shall also first consider the subject of shell-fish as food. In man's most primitive state his animal food was derived mainly from such species as could most easily be obtained, and we may be sure that among these the mulluska were brought into use first. As Mr. Holmes says, "Weapons or other appliances were not necessary in the capture of mollusks; a stone to break the shell, or one of the massive valves of the shells themselves, sufficed for all purposes."¹

We would naturally expect to come across allusions to the use of shell-fish for food by the interior tribes in the *Jesuit Relations* or in other early narratives, but in not one of these do we find a single reference. Such references as we do have, relate to species found on the Atlantic coast only. This is all the more surprising when we consider how minutely these early writers went into details of savage life. The use of the land and fresh-water snails also seems to have escaped notice; but when we find that some of these same writers state that the Indians ate snakes, "Grubs, the *Nymphæ* of Wasps, some kinds of *Scarabæi*, *Cicade*,"² locusts, spiders and unmentionable filth and vermin, we must come to the conclusion that snails, being less objectionable than some of the things mentioned, would likewise be eaten.³

¹"Art in Shell of the Ancient Americans." (Report Bureau of American Ethnology 1880), p. 188.

²Robert Beverly: *The History and Present State of Virginia* (London, 1705), Book III., p. 60.

³Since the above was written the following information was received from Dr. A. L. Kroeber, Secretary of the Department of Anthropology, University of California: "The most prominent and conspicuous animal of the snail kind that occurs in the moister parts of California," he says, "is the large yellow, horned slug [*Ariolimax californicus*, evidently], growing to a length of five or six inches. This I know to have been eaten by the Indians of Northwestern California, and I presume by other tribes also. It is said to have been broiled alive on hot stones. A smaller, dark reddish snail, also with horns, and an almost perfectly round flat shell, about an inch and a half in diameter and less than half an inch in height, was also eaten, being prepared in the same way."