

# Nation Making

A STORY OF  
NEW ZEALAND SAVAGEISM & CIVILIZATION.

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## CHAPTER XLIII. CANNIBALISM.

A short cut to secure 'survival of the fittest'—Eat your enemies first, your friends last—Darwin's instance contrary to fact—Maoria as Captain Cook saw them—Cannibalism not justly a reproach to Maoria—'O, that I could eat a Governor'—Cannibalism not confined to savages—The factory system—More ways of devouring men than eating them—The century of inventions—Cannibalism not 'a lost art' in countries where the sweating system, the company system, the trust system prevail—The new way to make or unmake a nation.



HIS may seem a strange heading for a chapter in 'Nation-making'; and yet to write about the making of this young New Zealand nation, and to say nothing about a custom which in the old days made New Zealand a name of terror to Englishmen, would be to make a grave omission in my story, for, of a truth, the custom of devouring one another played no little part in the efforts these Maori children of nature—savages we called them—were making to struggle through the various phases of savagism into a national life, though of a low type. Let us mercifully judge these benighted cannibal Maoria who were unwittingly putting in practice the Darwinian theory of evolution. They may have made short cuts, for they effectively secured 'the survival of the fittest' by devouring the helpless and the weak, by eating, after cooking, those who were unable to resist their cunning or their prowess.

For many years cannibalism amongst the Maoria has ceased. Under various influences it has become 'a lost art.' *Kai tangata* (human flesh) no longer forms a part of the food of a modern Maori, no longer appears on the bill of fare at any of his great tribal feasts. He is ashamed of the practice, and in these days, never refers to it except to prove his title to lands in the Native Land Courts.

Though the Maoria, under the influence of missionary teaching, aided by a plentiful supply of pigs, have abandoned cannibalism, Mr H. H. Johnston, in the *Fortnightly* for January, 1889, tells us that it is still in full vigour in Central Africa. The hideous forms cannibalism has taken there call forth his strongest condemnation. Though for himself he says that when once dead, 'he would prefer to be eaten by a fellow human, or even by an enterprising hyena, and so continue to assist in the development of higher forms of life, than be doomed to absorption by a mixed myriad of lower organisms.' He tells us that the Tibetans, some six centuries ago, 'reverently reduced their dead friends to an edible paste and then consumed them.' He goes on to describe how the savages in Africa, Australia, and Polynesia ate their old people as well as their weakly children, adding grimly that 'the community must have seemed always in a state of vigour with a society forever in the prime of life.' This is 'the survival of the fittest' with a vengeance; but however much it may be in accord with the Darwinian theory, it is not likely to be adopted in this exact form by civilized communities, for a while at least.

Civilized communities are naturally shocked at such a practical mode of improving the physique of a nation. The aboriginal natives of New Zealand, as I have said, were once famous (or infamous) for their cannibal practices. For them, however, there was some excuse, seeing that when the first Maoria arrived in New Zealand the only quadruped on the islands was a small rat. In the sunny lands they had left behind them, a thousand miles or more, fruit and vegetables were abundant, and they were naturally vegetarians. But when they migrated to New Zealand they found that a colder climate needed something more than a vegetable diet. Being naturally fearless navigators, they quickly turned to the 'harvest of the sea.' Sharks they caught in abundance, and dried in the sun for future use. Fish, which swam round the coasts, they dragged from the deep.

For centuries this ready supply of food probably kept them close to the coast line, where they multiplied and grew. The *kumara* and *taro* they had brought with them from their original island home. Both these roots grew freely well with careful cultivation on the sea coast in New Zealand, where there was not much frost. But they went a very little way in providing for an increasing population. Yet, with one exception, New Zealand was as destitute of fruits and roots as animals. That one exception, however—fern root—as will be seen in a succeeding chapter, was an important one.

Not unaturally tribal quarrels occurred as their numbers increased. If accident or necessity they fell to eating their enemies killed or taken in battle, and the taste for human flesh once acquired, soon became a general and fixed custom amongst them.

At this point it will be advantageous to make a short digression the better to understand the reason of the practice of cannibalism by the Maoria.

Wherever the Maori race came from, or whoever were his remote ancestors, he is without doubt, in many respects, the most remarkable savage the English race has met with in its discoveries and conquests all over the world.

When Captain Cook discovered New Zealand the Maoria were largely in a state of nature, without iron implements, ignorant of the art of pottery, rude agriculturists, fierce

warriors, but expert fishermen, going to sea in canoes built out of great trees, and fashioned by stone adzes or axes—the only tools with which they were acquainted.

The use of these stone implements by the Maoria offers a remarkable comment on Sir John Lubbock's assertion in his 'Prehistoric Times,' second edition, 1869, and adopted by Darwin in his 'Descent of Man,' seventh edition, 1871, vol. i., chap. v. as follows:—

'In all parts of Europe, as far east as Greece, in Palestine, India, Japan, New Zealand, and Africa, including Egypt, flint tools have been discovered in abundance, and of their use the existing inhabitants retain no tradition.'

Regarding stone tools, this statement is contrary to fact so far as New Zealand is concerned.

Now, the extreme antiquity of man is an adopted dogma by scientists, and may be a fact, but the New Zealand instance as above cited by Darwin, on the authority of Sir John Lubbock, is not entitled to any weight in determining the question, inasmuch as there not only are 'traditions' of the use of stone tools, but there are now living hundreds of New Zealanders (Maoria), many of whom are acquaintances of my own, who assert not only that their ancestors used stone tools, but who have assured me that they have themselves used stone tools in fashioning and finishing their canoes, houses, and storehouses.

Thousands of stone implements have been dug or ploughed up by the New Zealand colonists, and are still being unearthed in the neighbourhood of every Maori village or field of battle.

When Cook made the acquaintance of the Maoria they were a grand race physically. Holding their lands, their fishing grounds, their women, and their lives by valour and force of arms, exposed to attack from every neighbouring tribe, constantly surprised if they relaxed an ever-watchful vigilance, they were naturally both warlike and suspicious.

Largely ignorant of the textile arts, they were naked except for the *kakahu* (a rough covering for the shoulders), used occasionally, and a slight cincture round the loins. These, with feather cloaks and elaborately ornamented mats, made at a cost of infinite labour and time, and used chiefly on important occasions, were their only clothing. These garments were made from the pithium tenax scraped by shells, the natural flax of the country, which grows everywhere, and is now becoming, under machine treatment, a large export from New Zealand.

To estimate the number of the Maoria in Cook's time—a hundred years ago—is difficult. Estimates varying from 200,000 to 300,000 have been made. Though these are mere guesses, it is evident from the number of earth-work fortresses and abandoned cultivations—long since gone back into secondary forest—that their number must have been large. Before the time of Cook's visits, and for some time after, frequent tribal wars must have reduced their number.

For besides tribal quarrels on ordinary grounds, it must be remembered that the last migration of the Maoria had been from a tropical climate—where only a vegetable diet was necessary or possible—to a temperate climate, where animal food in some form was almost a necessity. But the Maori immigrants to New Zealand found, as I have remarked in another chapter, no animal of any kind save a small rat, nor, indeed, any vegetable available for food except fern-root.

The North Island of New Zealand, the chief home of the Maoria, is remarkable for the extent, beauty, and variety of the ferns it produces, having about one hundred and forty of the varieties of ferns known to science. From their earliest settlement in New Zealand their chief article of diet must have been the root of the fern. This, as elsewhere stated, they dug, roasted and pounded into a grey meal, eating it in the form of porridge with such *kinakins* (relishes) as eels, fish, or sharks afforded.

There can be no doubt that the Maori race in Cook's time, and for long afterwards, owed its fine physique to the consumption of fern-root as its chief article of diet. To procure enough of this food the Maori had to work hard and constantly. It is to this circumstance, together with the wonderful healthiness of the New Zealand climate, that the Maori has developed a physical and mental vigour far superior to his fat and enervated kinsmen of the tropical islands from which he came. There the luscious fruits and soft climate developed fat and soft tissues generally; in New Zealand the stronger food and harder toil produced more muscle, and probably more brain.

I may now return to the cannibalism of the Maoria. It has been regarded as a reproach to them, and I think not altogether justly, considering their wants and position.

Living in a climate where animal food of some kind was more or less necessary, and yet where practically no animal was to be found, is it surprising that the slain should become food for the conquerors, or that, to satisfy the craving for animal food, quarrels should have been provoked with neighbouring tribes, often for no other purpose than to provide flesh to eat.

Of course in these contests the 'weakest went to the wall,' or rather to the oven and the stomach. In this way the Maoria put practically in force the doctrine of 'the survival of the fittest' long before Darwin and his fellows made the dogma fashionable.

Captain Cook's introduction of the pig did more to destroy cannibalism than any other measure. The pig took well to the country. To grub for fern root was natural to him, to increase and multiply with such an abundance of food was equally natural, and in a short time the pig overran a large portion of the North Island, thus providing an abundance of animal food, and striking an effective blow at cannibalism in New Zealand.

For though tribal quarrels continued, they were no longer caused by the old craving for animal food, which the pig supplied with less danger than killing a man involved. It is true that the Maori, like most other varieties of humanity, was a Conservative animal, and continued to follow the ways of his ancestors when there was no particular reason for doing so. From ancient custom, therefore, he remained a cannibal to some extent, more especially as he believed that to eat a renowned warrior enabled those who ate him not only to satisfy their hunger or vengeance, but to absorb the valour and *mana* (influence) of the roasted chief.

'O that I could eat the Governor' said a chief in the Northern war. 'I should be the greatest chief in the island.'

Again, in tribal contests about lands he probably found the best mode of ending the dispute and establishing his right lay in killing and eating the disputants or former owners, thus acquiring the most effective of all titles—a title by digestion.

To this day, in the Native Lands Courts established by Act of Parliament to ascertain the ownership of Maori lands, if a native can prove that his ancestors killed and ate the former owner, his title to the land is regarded as indisputable. Indeed, a case not long ago occurred in a Native Lands Court, in which a native claimant was being cross-examined by a counter-claimant to the land in dispute.

'Where,' asked he, 'was my father after the battle fought between your tribe and mine?'

'I don't know,' he promptly replied, 'where the whole of him was, but a good part of him was here,' significantly tapping his stomach.

The opposing claimant at once collapsed. His case was closed, his cause lost, and the land became vested in the man who had eaten the former proprietor.

'This is very awful! What savages your Maoria must have been!' exclaims a sleek Chancery lawyer. And yet how many landed properties are swallowed by legal quibblers by a mode not so simple perhaps as by the Maori mode, but equally effective? What is this but cannibalism in a fashionable—if a more cowardly—form?

A very cursory survey of the condition of England will show that cannibalism is not confined to low class limbs of the laws.

When Arkwright discovered the spinning jenny in 1776, followed by Cartwright's invention of the power loom, and by Watt's practical discovery of the steam engine, a new form of nation-making became the fashion. These inventors were Englishmen, and for fifty years or more England had the monopoly of the new forces in nation-making they called into existence.

Under their influence factories were built, and filled with the stalwart youths and rosy-faced lasses from peasant homes, scattered over England and Scotland. In this flocking from home to factory, from country to town, their old home life received its first and most fatal blow. Simple, plain country life gave place to the garish excitement of the town. Long hours of labour in the fresh open air were replaced by long hours of toil in the unwholesome atmosphere of the factory. The merry whirr of the spinner's wheel died out, and was heard no more in the land. The hum, and clang, and clatter of machinery took its place. The master of the factory stepped into the shoes of the feudal lord, and the serf of an older time, through various changes, had become 'factory hands.'

Without denying that cloth and calico became cheaper if not better, the change was in many ways for the worse, the service harder. The spinner and weaver—man, woman, and child—became automata, almost as much machines as the spinning jennies and looms they worked, and too often cared for as little or less.

Meanwhile the lords of the factories grew rich. Many of the 'new men' migrated into 'the stately homes of England.' Their modern serfs crowded the hovels of the towns.

Then came the railways and free trade. These two new forces made the towns bigger, the rich richer, the poor poorer. The old aristocrats were in the main eclipsed and crowded out by the new plutocrats. Money, or its synonym, capital, became king. To be the owner of millions was a ruling passion; to control millions became the ruling power. Under the influence of this master passion, this money tyranny, ancient forms of virtue, self-denial, Christian duty, love of man, love of God, lost their vital force, and if they were not altogether kicked out of the Temple of Mammon, they took a back seat in it.

And this condition of affairs is regarded as progress.

This is the nation-making current in England during what may be termed 'the century of inventions'; that one century has just ended by ranging the 'millionsaires' on one side, the 'millions' on the other. Dives in his pride and purple, Lazarus in his discontent and bitterness. Dives in his purple luxury faring sumptuously every day, Lazarus in his squalid hovel starving on the crumbs and gone to the dogs generally.

Let as hope Dives will consider his ways and be wise before it be too late. Otherwise, if he will not read the signs of the times, if he will not listen to the warning voices of law and gospel, then, in some coming time, like his purple prototype, he may lift up his eyes for help in vain.

Verily, if cannibalism be a lost art amongst the Maoria, in the sweating system, in the company system, in the trust system, and in many other forms, it still survives amongst more civilized people, and on this foundation much nation-making is now proceeding. The process is not confined to England or the United States. It is in full operation in the colonies.

It is unnecessary to trace the practice of modern cannibalism to the shambles where, under various pretexts and disguises, its victims are offered. Suffice it to say that the so-called hunger for wealth, the mad race for riches, are making great and degrading changes in individual and national character. The 'almighty dollar,' as our American cousins term it, is the god whose worship is extending in the modern world more than all other cults. It is the Moloch of our century, which, under the sanction of English law, made fashionable by many of the maxims of a spurious political economy, demands and devours its victims as ruthlessly, as remorselessly as the Maori savage of a past generation.

The Maori has almost forgotten his cannibalism. He is altogether ashamed of it, and except to maintain his title to his pastoral acres cannot be induced to acknowledge that he or his kinsmen ever devoured any of human kind. When one of his descendants in some coming century visits England as Macaulay's New Zealander, and sits on a broken arch of London bridge, he may be heard by those near him saying:

'Those English who formerly dwelt in this deserted city were a very foolish people. They carried their cannibalism too far. My ancestors were wise, and ceased to devour one another. Their good example was unheeded by the white faces with hearts of stone, for the English people would go on devouring one another, the big fish eating the little ones,' and pointing to St. Paul's in ruins, he gravely adds:

'This is what comes of it. *Kais* (it is ended).'

THE END.

Mrs Henpeck (hearing a rumour): 'You, Charles, I'd like to know what you are up to now?' Mr Henpeck (feebly): 'I suppose, my dear, I can fall down the cellar stairs if want to.'