

Morbid Menus and Macabre Meals

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It seems that no creature on earth is so perverse as the human beast, yet none can compare with him in being amusing at those moments when he intends to be most serious. People still visit zoos, aquariums and menageries to be amused at the antics of the imprisoned animal life, yet the vast world of entertainment of the human species capering on the streets, fighting in sports stadiums, or dispatching human creatures to a heavenly abode In other parts of the world, no longer interests anyone.

From boyhood I was fascinated by cannibals and felt some pangs of remorse when I learned that the missionaries had converted them into good Christians and they now went to church instead of going head-hunting. There is no accounting for the tastes of mankind. The cartoon of the missionary in the cannibal's cooking pot was once a popular feature of comic papers and jokes. They provided readers with macabre amusement to think that Christian missionaries who were bent on filling the natives with the enthusiasm of a new religion; were themselves used to fill the cooking-pots and, later, the natives.

In Pidgin English, that fascinating dialect which amused seamen, but caused Oxford dons to tear out their hair, the natives called human flesh "long pig". This is probably because no pig had a hind part so long as a man's leg. Rumour has it that the taste of both are similar. Although right-minded people regard the missionary with repugnance, among the cannibals he could have been more welcome than we suppose. There is no record of how many missionaries vanished in this way, but one might suppose the numbers could have been less sufficient than we could hope.

Now from an obscure corner of recent press reports from Western Papua (New Guinea) there emerges an interesting story glittering in its primitive simplicity and innocence. In a remote village a native had been killed in a family feud. Seven of his neighbours went to his relatives and volunteered to dispose of the body without cost or trouble to themselves. This was agreed and the corpse was taken away to fulfill the promise. Their method of disposal became an Epicurean fantasy and after cutting the body into pieces of suitable size, they were deposited in a cooking-pot and boiled into a gruesome stew to which herbs and condiments had been added.

When cooking was complete the delectable contents of the pot found its way into the stomachs of the seven tribesmen.

Somehow the incident attracted the attention of the police and the tribesmen were rounded up and dragged into Port Moresby. There they were charged with "improper and indecent interference with a corpse" in a legal terminology more suitable to some supposed sexual perversion than a simple act of cannibalism. One cannot help thinking

that a few years ago, especially during the mania of the missionaries to “civilize” native people, the seven epicures would have suffered some dire punishment as a warning to others with similar appetites. But in these days of open permissiveness and legalization of homosexual relationships, tolerance of prostitution and broad-minded indifference to aggressive warfare and murder of the innocents, eating dead bodies was pronounced as not being illegal. In dismissing the charges against the seven consumers of human goulash, the judge ruled that “cannibalism is a normal and reasonable behaviour for some remote New Guinea villagers.” Eating the dead was to be regarded as legal and comparable with burial or cremation as a means of disposal. Obviously New Guinea is no place for vegetarians, vegans or sea-weed consumers. However, real live cannibals could be a great tourist attraction.

In an age when the world is threatened with over-population and the threat of possible food shortage, the question of human flesh as diet might yet have to receive official consideration. It now becomes obvious that many countries are throwing into holes and burying that very commodity which might be of food value to the hungry. There is little doubt that if suitably canned it could be an export commodity and find a ready market, at least in New Guinea. In the not too far distant future it might be the only means left to satisfy the palates of non-vegetarians.

Upton Sinclair, in his book, *The Jungle* tells us of a human being falling into the giant mixing-vat in an American meatworks, and was processed, canned and later eaten without any complaint from the consumers.

The gruesome Aghoris of India are said to have been given human flesh to eat at their initiations. This was generally choice pieces filched from the cremation ground rather than specially cooked morsels. Shri Ramakrishna, the Bengali Saint, is said to have undertaken a similar initiation but shrank from actually eating the human titbit. He satisfied the initiation rites by tasting it with the tongue. The Aghoris took this meat to prove to themselves and others that the concept of opposites—good and bad, nice and unpleasant (also mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita*)—only existed in the mind. The Lord Shiva is also known by the name Aghora and meaning that there is nothing really horrible, or can be in a world supported by delusion. Yet it will probably be a long time before ready cooked and packaged thigh muscles find their way into the American Supermarket, although the legs of frogs have already done so (exported from vegetarian India from a Mysore State factory). Of course the Archbishop would never approve, not even if Mr. Nixon were to appear on television masticating the mammary glands of a Vietnamese village belle. It took a lot of propaganda to condition Westerners into eating dead wheat flour, cornflakes of worthless food value, a diet embellished with coloured dyes and preservatives as well as fruit and vegetables flavoured with insect sprays and fertilizers, but otherwise tasteless. Yet homo-sapiens has taken to eating homo-sapiens without propaganda advertising and outside pressure. From archaeological evidence it is deduced that primitive man was not only a cannibal but broke open the tough bones to suck out the succulent marrow.

If we have tended to be facetious and deal lightly with a ghastly and ghoulish subject it is only to ask what are the virtuous or moral standards which make it ethical and permissible to eat the flesh of animals yet shrink from consuming the flesh of human beings? And where does mankind go from here?

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