

flour of maize, oil of turtle's eggs, or fat of the crocodile. We ourselves examined, both at the Orinoco and after our return to Paris, the balls of earth which we brought away with us, and found no trace of the mixture of any organic substance, whether oily or farinaceous. The savage regards every thing as nourishing that appeases hunger: when, therefore, you inquire of an Ottomac on what he subsists during the two months when the river is at its highest flood he shows you his balls of clayey earth. This he calls his principal food at the period when he can seldom procure a lizard, a root of fern, or a dead fish swimming at the surface of the water. If necessity force the Indians to eat earth during two months (and from three quarters to five quarters of a pound in twenty-four hours), he eats it from choice during the rest of the year. Every day in the season of drought, when fishing is most abundant, he scrapes his balls of *poya*, and mingles a little clay with his other aliment. It is most surprising that the Ottomacs do not become lean by swallowing such quantities of earth: they are, on the contrary, extremely robust. The missionary Fray Ramon Bueno asserts, that he never remarked any alteration in the health of the natives at the period of the great risings of the Orinoco.

The Ottomacs during some months eat daily three-quarters of a pound of clay slightly hardened by fire, but which they moisten before swallowing it. It has not been possible to verify hitherto with precision how much nutritious vegetable or animal matter they take in a week at the same time; but they attribute the sensation of satiety which they feel, to the clay, and not to the wretched aliments which they take with it occasionally.

No physiological phenomenon being entirely insulated, it may be interesting to examine several analogous phenomena, which I have been able to collect. I observed everywhere within the torrid zone, in a great number of individuals, children, women, and sometimes even full-grown men, an inordinate and almost irresistible desire of swallowing earth; not an alkaline or calcareous earth, to neutralize (as it is said) acid juices, but a fat clay, unctuous, and exhaling a strong smell. It is often found necessary to tie the children's hands or to confine them, to prevent their eating earth,