

E S S A Y S,

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By BENJAMIN RUSH, M. D.

AND PROFESSOR OF THE INSTITUTES OF MEDICINE
AND CLINICAL PRACTICE

I N T H E

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AN ACCOUNT OF THE VICES PECULIAR TO THE INDIANS OF NORTH AMERICA.

IT has become fashionable of late years for the philosophers of Europe to celebrate the virtues of the savages of America.—Whether the design of their encomiums was to expose christianity, and depreciate the advantages of civilization, I know not; but they have evidently had those effects upon the minds of weak people. Without contradicting the accounts that have been published by those gentlemen, of the virtues of the Indians in North America, I shall briefly add an account of some of their vices, in order to complete their natural history. My information shall be taken from the travels of Charlevoix—Hennepin—Carver—Romans and Bartram, and from conversations with persons of veracity who have resided among them.

The first vice I shall name, that is universal among our savages, is **UNCLEANNESS**. They are, in general, strangers to the obligations both of morality and decency, as far as they relate to the marriage bed.—The exceptions to this remark, have been produced among those nations chiefly, who have had an occasional intercourse with civilized nations.

2. **NASTINESS** is another Indian vice. This is exemplified in their food—drinks—drefs—persons—and above all, in their total disregard to decency in the *time—place—and manner* of their natural evacuations.

3. **DRUNKENNESS** is a more general vice among savages than among civilized nations.—Whole Indian tribes have been destroyed by it. Indeed they glory in their fondness for strong liquors, and consider it as a part of their character. A countryman who had dropt from his cart a keg of rum, rode back a few miles in hopes of finding it. On his way he met an Indian who lived in his neighbourhood, whom he asked if he had seen his keg of rum on the road? The Indian laughed in his face, and addressed him in the following words. “What a fool you are to ask an Indian such a question. Don’t you see I am sober? Had I met with your keg, you would have found it empty on one side of the road, and an Indian Tom drunk and asleep on the other.”

4. **GLUTTONY** is very common among Indians. To this their long abstinence, produced by their idleness, naturally tempts them.—It is very common to see them stretch themselves on the ground after a full meal, and grunt there for several hours till they recover from the effects of their intemperance. Mr. Bartram tells us, that they sometimes rise in the middle of the night, in order to gratify their appetites for eating.

5. **TREACHERY** is another Indian vice. Who ever trusted to an Indian treaty?—They generally begin their wars, with professions of peace and perpetual friendship.

6. The *cruelty* of Indians is well known. They consider compassion as a mark of effeminacy. Their treatment of their prisoners, shews them to possess a spirit of revenge, which places them upon a footing with infernal spirits.

7. **IDLENESS** is the universal vice of savages.—They are not only too lazy to work, but even to think. Nothing but the powerful stimulus of hunger, or revenge, is sufficient to rouse them into action.

8. **THEFT** is an Indian vice. The Indians not only steal from their civilized neighbours, but from each other. A horse—a gun—or spirits, have charms in the eyes of an Indian that no restraints can prevent his stealing, whenever they come in his way.

9. **GAMING** belongs in an eminent degree to the Catalogue of Indian vices.

10. But the infamy of the Indian character is completed by the low rank to which they degrade their women. It is well known that their women perform all their work. They not only prepare their victuals, but plant, hoe and gather their corn and roots. They are seldom admitted to their feasts, or share in their conversation. The men oblige them

to lie at their feet, when they sleep *without* fire; and at their backs when they sleep *before* a fire. They afford them no assistance in the toils of tending, feeding, and carrying their children. They are even insensible of the dangers to which their women are often exposed in travelling with them. A gentleman from Northumberland county, informed me, that he once saw a body of Indian men and women wading across the river Susquehannah. The men arrived first on the opposite shore, and pursued their journey along the river. The women, some of whom had children on their backs, upon coming to a deep and rapid current, suddenly cried out for help, and made signs to their husbands and fathers to come to their assistance. The men stood for a few minutes—and after attentively surveying their distress, bursted out a laughing, and then with a merry indifference, walked from them along the shore.

This is a short nomenclature of the vices of the Indians of North America. If it were necessary, I would quote the chapters and pages of the authors who have established by their observations, the truth of the character I have given of them. I am not disposed to enter into an examination of their virtues, but I cannot help supposing them to be rather the *qualities of necessity*, than the offspring of feeling, or principle. Their hospitality—their friendships—their patience—and their fidelity to engagements, are the effects of necessity, and are as essential to their existence; a

honesty is to a band of associated robbers. Their politeness in never contradicting any person, I believe is the effect of indolence, for I know of nothing that lazy people dislike more than to dispute, even where truth is on their side, or where victory is certain.—Where is the man that in a lazy fit (to which all men at times are subject) has not heard false and absurd opinions advanced in company, without contradicting them?

The taciturnity of the Indians which has been so much celebrated, as a mark of their wisdom, is the effect of their want of ideas. Except in cases of extraordinary pride, I believe taciturnity, in nine cases out of ten in civilized company, is the effect of stupidity. I will make one more exception to this rule, and that is in favour of those people who are in the habits of communicating their thoughts, by writing for the public, or by corresponding with their friends. Ideas, whether acquired from books, or by reflection, produce a plethora in the mind, which can only be relieved by depletion from the pen, or tongue.

But what shall we say to the encomiums that have been lavished upon the love of liberty which characterizes our savage neighbours?—Why—that they arise from an ignorance of the influence of property, upon the human mind.—Property, and a regard for law, are born together in all societies. The passion

for liberty in an Indian, is as different from the passion for it in a civilized republican, as the impurity of lust, is from the delicacy of love. There is a certain medium to be observed between an affection for law, and for liberty. An excess of the former has sometimes led to tyranny, while an excess of the latter, leads to idleness and vice. The Athenians appear to have been intoxicated with an excess of liberty when they spent their whole time in hearing and telling news. There is always an excess of law or liberty in a community where poor men are idle, or where vices of any kind are suffered with impunity.

The only reflections that I shall add upon this subject, shall be,—how great are the blessings of civil government which extirpates, restrains, or punishes the vices that have been mentioned! and how great is the efficacy of christianity, which, by purifying the heart, renders the practice of the contrary virtues natural and agreeable?