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978-1-108-06018-9 - The History of the American Indians: Particularly those Nations Adjoining to the Mississippi, East and West Florida, Georgia, South and North Carolina, and Virginia

James Adair

Excerpt

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A

H I S T O R Y

O F T H E

NORTH-AMERICAN INDIANS,

THEIR CUSTOMS, &c.

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*Observations on the colour, shape, temper, and dress of  
the Indians of America.*

**T**HE Indians are of a copper or red-clay colour—and they delight in every thing, which they imagine may promote and increase it: accordingly, they paint their faces with vermilion, as the best and most beautiful ingredient. If we consider the common laws of nature and providence, we shall not be surprized at this custom; for every thing loves best its own likeness and place in the creation, and is disposed to ridicule its opposite. If a deformed son of burning Africa, was to paint the devil, he would not do it in black colours, nor delineate him with a shagged coarse woolly head, nor with thick lips, a short flat nose, or clumsy feet, like those of a bear: his devil would represent one of a different nation or people. But was he to draw an agreeable picture,—according to the African taste, he would daub it all over with footy black. All the Indians are so strongly attached to, and prejudiced in favour of, their own colour, that they think as meanly of the whites, as we possibly can do of them. The English traders among them, experience much of it, and are often very glad to be allowed to pass muster with the Indian chieftains, as fellow-brethren

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of the human species. One instance will sufficiently shew in what flattering glasses they view themselves.

Some time past, a large body of the English Indian traders, on their way to the *Choktah* country, were escorted by a body of Creek and Choktah warriors. The Creeks having a particular friendship for some of the traders, who had treated them pretty liberally, took this opportunity to chide the Choktahs, before the traders, in a smart though friendly way, for not allowing to the English the name of human creatures:—for the general name they give us in their most favourable *war-speeches*, resembles that of a contemptible, heterogeneous animal.

The hotter, or colder the climate is, where the Indians have long resided, the greater proportion have they either of the red, or white, colour. I took particular notice of the Shawano Indians, as they were passing from the northward, within fifty miles of the Chikkafah country, to that of the Creeks; and, by comparing them with the Indians which I accompanied to their camp, I observed the Shawano to be much fairer than the Chikkafah\*; though I am satisfied, their endeavours to cultivate the copper colour, were alike. Many incidents and observations lead me to believe, that the Indian colour is not natural; but that the external difference between them and the whites, proceeds entirely from their customs and method of living, and not from any inherent spring of nature; which will entirely overturn Lord Kames's whole system of colour, and separate races of men.

That the Indian colour is merely accidental, or artificial, appears pretty evident. Their own traditions record them to have come to their present lands by the way of the west, from a far distant country, and where there was no variegation of colour in human beings; and they are entirely ignorant which was the first or primitive colour. Besides, their rites, customs, &c. as we shall presently see, prove them to be orientals: and, as the difference of colour among the human species, is one of the principal causes of separation, strife, and bloodshed, would it not greatly reflect on the goodness and justice of the Divine Being, ignominiously to brand numerous tribes and their posterity, with a colour odious and hateful in the sight and opinion of those of a different colour. Some writers have contended, from

\* S is not a note of plurality with the Indians; when I mention therefore either their national, or proper names, that common error is avoided, which writers ignorant of their language constantly commit.

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the diversity of colour, that America was not peopled from any part of Asia, or of the old world, but that the natives were a separate creation. Of this opinion, is Lord Kames, and which he labours to establish in his late publication, entitled, *Sketches of the History of Man*. But his reasoning on this point, for a local creation, is contrary both to revelation, and facts. His chief argument, that “there is not a single hair on the body of any American, nor the least appearance of a beard,” is utterly destitute of foundation, as can be attested by all who have had any communication with them—of this more presently.—Moreover, to form one creation of *whites*, a second creation for the *yellowes*, and a third for the *blacks*, is a weakness, of which infinite wisdom is incapable. Its operations are plain, easy, constant, and perfect. The variegation therefore of colours among the human race, depends upon a second cause. Lord Kames himself acknowledges, that “the Spanish inhabitants of Carthagea in South-America lose their vigour and colour in a few months.”

We are informed by the anatomical observations of our American physicians, concerning the Indians, that they have discerned a certain fine cowl, or web, of a red gluey substance, close under the outer skin, to which it reflects the colour; as the epidermis, or outer skin, is alike clear in every different creature. And experience, which is the best medium to discover truth, gives the true cause why this corpus mucosum, or gluish web, is red in the Indians, and white in us; the parching winds, and hot sun-beams, beating upon their naked bodies, in their various gradations of life, necessarily tarnish their skins with the tawny red colour. Add to this, their constant anointing themselves with bear’s oil, or grease, mixt with a certain red root, which, by a peculiar property, is able alone, in a few years time, to produce the Indian colour in those who are white born, and who have even advanced to maturity. These metamorphoses I have often seen.

At the Shawano main camp \*, I saw a Penfylvanian, a white man by birth, and in profession a christian, who, by the inclemency of the sun,

\* In the year 1747, I headed a company of the cheerful, brave Chikkafah, with the eagles tails, to the camp of the Shawano Indians, to apprehend one Peter Shartee, (a Frenchman) who, by his artful paintings, and the supine conduct of the Penfylvanian government, had decoyed a large body of the Shawano from the English, to the French, interest. But fearing the consequences, he went round an hundred miles, toward the Cheerake nation, with his family, and the head warriors, and thereby evaded the danger.

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and his endeavours of improving the red colour, was tarnished with as deep an Indian hue, as any of the camp, though they had been in the woods only the space of four years.

We may easily conclude then, what a fixt change of colour, such a constant method of life would produce: for the colour being once thoroughly established, nature would, as it were, forget herself, not to beget her own likenefs. Besides, may we not suppose, that the imagination can impress the animalculæ, in the time of copulation, by its strong subtil power, with at least such an external similitude, as we speak of?—The sacred oracles, and christian registers, as well as Indian traditions, support the sentiment;—the colour of Jacob's cattle resembled that of the peeled rods he placed before them, in the time of conception. We have good authority of a Spanish lady, who conceived, and was delivered of a negro child, by means of a black picture that hung on the wall, opposite to the bed where she lay. There is a record among the Chikkasah Indians, that tells us of a white child with flaxen hair, born in their country, long before any white people appeared in that part of the world; which they ascribed to the immediate power of the Deity impressing her imagination in a dream. And the Philosophical Transactions assure us of two white children having been born of black parents. But waving all other arguments, the different method of living, connected with the difference of climates, and extraordinary anointings and paintings, will effect both outward and inward changes in the human race, all round the globe: or, a different colour may be conveyed to the fœtus by the parents, through the channel of the fluids, without the least variation of the original stamina. For, though the laws of nature cannot be traced far, where there are various circumstances, and combinations of things, yet her works are exquisitely constant and regular, being thereto impelled by unerring divine Wisdom.

As the American Indians are of a reddish or copper colour,—so in general they are strong, well proportioned in body and limbs, surprisngly active and nimble, and hardy in their own way of living.

They are ingenious, witty, cunning, and deceitful; very faithful indeed to their own tribes, but privately dishonest, and mischievous to the Europeans and christians. Their being honest and harmless to each other, may be through fear of resentment and reprisal—which is unavoidable in case of any injury.

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They are very close, and retentive of their secrets ; never forget injuries ; revengeful of blood, to a degree of distraction. They are timorous, and, consequently, cautious ; very jealous of encroachments from their christian neighbours ; and, likewise, content with freedom, in every turn of fortune. They are possessed of a strong comprehensive judgment,—can form surpris-ingly crafty schemes, and conduct them with equal caution, silence, and address ; they admit none but distinguished warriors, and old beloved men, into their councils. They are slow, but very persevering in their under-takings—commonly temperate in eating, but excessively immoderate in drinking.—They often transform themselves by liquor into the likeness of mad foaming bears. The women, in general, are of a mild, amiable, soft disposition : exceedingly modest in their behaviour, and very seldom noisy, either in the single, or married state.

The men are expert in the use of fire-arms,—in shooting the bow,—and throwing the feathered dart, and tomohawk, into the flying enemy. They resemble the lynx, with their sharp penetrating black eyes, and are exceedingly swift of foot ; especially in a long chase : they will stretch away, through the rough woods, by the bare track, for two or three hundred miles, in pursuit of a flying enemy, with the continued speed, and eagerness, of a stanch pack of blood hounds, till they shed blood. When they have allayed this their burning thirst, they return home, at their leisure, unless they chance to be pursued, as is sometimes the case ; whence the traders say, “ that an Indian is never in a hurry, but when the devil is at his heels.”

It is remarkable, that there are no deformed Indians—however, they are generally weaker, and smaller bodied, between the tropics, than in the higher latitudes ; but not in an equal proportion : for, though the Chikkafah and Choktah countries have not been long divided from each other, as appears by the similarity of their language, as well as other things, yet the Chikkafah are exceedingly taller, and stronger bodied than the latter, though their country is only two degrees farther north. Such a small difference of latitude, in so healthy a region, could not make so wide a difference in the constitution of their bodies. The former are a comely, pleasant looking people ; their faces are tolerably round, contrary to the visage of the others, which inclines much to flatness, as is the case of most of the other Indian Americans. The lips of the Indians, in general, are thin.

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Their eyes are small, sharp, and black; and their hair is lank, coarse, and darkish. I never saw any with curled hair, but one in the Choktah country, where was also another with red hair; probably, they were a mixture of the French and Indians. Romancing travellers, and their credulous copyists, report them to be *imbarbes*, and as persons *impueres*, and they appear so to strangers. But both sexes pluck all the hair off their bodies, with a kind of tweezers, made formerly of clam shells, now of middle sized wire, in the shape of a gun-worm; which, being twisted round a small stick, and the ends fastened therein, after being properly tempered, keeps its form: holding this Indian razor between their fore-finger and thumb, they depilume themselves, after the manner of the Jewish novitiate priests, and profelytes.—As the former could not otherwise be purified for the function of his sacerdotal office; or the latter, be admitted to the benefit of religious communion.

Their chief *dress* is very simple, like that of the patriarchal age; of choice, many of their old head-men wear a long wide frock, made of the skins of wild beasts, in honour of that antient custom: It must be necessity that forces them to the pinching sandals for their feet. They seem quite easy, and indifferent, in every various scene of life, as if they were utterly divested of passions, and the sense of feeling. Martial virtue, and not riches, is their invariable standard for preferment; for they neither esteem, nor despise any of their people one jot more or less, on account of riches or dress. They compare both these, to paint on a warrior's face; because it incites others to a spirit of martial benevolence for their country, and pleases his own fancy, and the eyes of spectators, for a little time, but is sweated off, while he is performing his war-dances; or is defaced, by the change of weather.

They formerly wore shirts, made of dressed deer-skins, for their summer visiting dress: but their winter-hunting clothes were long and shaggy, made of the skins of panthers, bucks, bears, beavers, and otters; the fleshy sides outward, sometimes doubled, and always softened like velvet-cloth, though they retained their fur and hair. The needles and thread they used formerly, (and now at times) were fish-bones, or the horns and bones of deer, rubbed sharp, and deer's sinews, and a sort of hemp, that grows among them spontaneously, in rich open lands. The women's dress consists only in a  
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broad softened skin, or several small skins sewed together, which they wrap and tye round their waist, reaching a little below their knees: in cold weather, they wrap themselves in the softened skins of buffalo calves, with the wintery shagged wool inward, never forgetting to anoint, and tie up their hair, except in their time of mourning. The men wear, for ornament, and the conveniencies of hunting, thin deer-skin boots, well smoked, that reach so high up their thighs, as with their jackets to secure them from the brambles and braky thickets. They sew them about five inches from the edges, which are formed into tassels, to which they fasten fawns trotters, and small pieces of tinkling metal, or wild turkey-cock-spurs. The beaus used to fasten the like to their war-pipes, with the addition of a piece of an enemy's scalp with a tuft of long hair hanging down from the middle of the stem, each of them painted red: and they still observe that old custom, only they choose bell-buttons, to give a greater sound.

The young Indian men and women, through a fondness of their ancient dress, wrap a piece of cloth round them, that has a near resemblance to the old Roman toga, or prætexta. 'Tis about a fathom square, bordered seven or eight quarters deep, to make a shining cavalier of the *beau monde*, and to keep out both the heat and cold. With this frantic apparel, the red heroes swaddle themselves, when they are waddling, whooping, and prancing it away, in their sweltery town-houses, or supposed synhedria, around the reputed holy fire. In a sweating condition, they will thus incommode themselves, frequently, for a whole night, on the same principle of pride, that the grave Spaniard's winter cloak must sweat him in summer.

They have a great aversion to the wearing of breeches; for to that custom, they affix the idea of helplessness, and effeminacy. I know a German of thirty years standing, chiefly among the Chikkafah Indians, who because he kept up his breeches with a narrow piece of cloth that reached across his shoulders, is distinguished by them, as are all his countrymen, by the despicable appellation, Kish-Kish Tarākshe, or *Tied Arse*.—They esteem the English much more than the Germans, because our limbs, they say, are less restrained by our apparel from manly exercise, than theirs. The Indian women also discreetly observe, that, as all their men sit down to make

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water, the ugly breeches would exceedingly incommode them; and that, if they were allowed to wear breeches, it would portend no good to their country: however, they add, should they ever be so unlucky, as to have that pinching custom introduced among them, the English breeches would best suit their own female posture on that occasion; but that it would be exceedingly troublesome either way. The men wear a slip of cloth, about a quarter of an ell wide, and an ell and an half long, in the lieu of breeches; which they put between their legs, and tie round their haunches, with a convenient broad bandage. The women, since the time we first traded with them, wrap a fathom of the half breadth of Stroud cloth round their waist, and tie it with a leathern belt, which is commonly covered with brass runners or buckles: but this sort of loose petticoat, reaches only to their hams, in order to shew their exquisitely fine proportioned limbs.

They make their shoes for common use, out of the skins of the bear and elk, well dressed and smoked, to prevent hardening; and those for ornament, out of deer-skins, done in the like manner: but they chiefly go bare-footed, and always bare-headed. The men fasten several different sorts of beautiful feathers, frequently in tufts; or the wing of a red bird, or the skin of a small hawk, to a lock of hair on the crown of their heads. And every different Indian nation when at war, trim their hair, after a different manner, through contempt of each other; thus we can distinguish an enemy in the woods, so far off as we can see him.

The Indians flatten their heads, in divers forms: but it is chiefly the crown of the head they depress, in order to beautify themselves, as their wild fancy terms it; for they call us *long heads*, by way of contempt. The Choktah Indians flatten their fore-heads, from the top of the head to the eye-brows with a small bag of sand; which gives them a hideous appearance; as the forehead naturally shoots upward, according as it is flattened: thus, the rising of the nose, instead of being equidistant from the beginning of the chin, to that of the hair, is, by their wild mechanism, placed a great deal nearer to the one, and farther from the other. The Indian nations, round South Carolina, and all the way to New Mexico, (properly called Mechiko) to effect this, fix the tender infant on a kind of cradle, where his feet are tilted, above a foot higher than a horizontal position,



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fition,—his head bends back into a hole, made on purpose to receive it, where he bears the chief part of his weight on the crown of the head, upon a small bag of sand, without being in the least able to move himself. The skull resembling a fine cartilaginous substance, in its infant state, is capable of taking any impression. By this pressure, and their thus flattening the crown of the head, they consequently make their heads thick, and their faces broad: for, when the smooth channel of nature is stopped in one place, if a destruction of the whole system doth not thereby ensue, it breaks out in a proportional redundancy, in another. May we not to this custom, and as a necessary effect of this cause, attribute their fickle, wild, and cruel tempers? especially, when we connect therewith, both a false education, and great exercise to agitate their animal spirits. When the brain, in cooler people, is disturbed, it neither reasons, nor determines, with proper judgment? The Indians thus look on every thing around them, through their own false medium; and vilify our heads, because they have given a wrong turn to their own.

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*Observations on the origin and descent of the Indians.*

THE very remote history of all nations, is disfigured with fable, and gives but little encouragement to distant enquiry, and laborious researches. Much of the early history and antiquities of nations is lost, and some people have no records at all, and to this day are rude and uncivilized. Yet a knowledge of them is highly interesting, and would afford amusement, and even instruction in the most polished times, to the most polite. Every science has certain principles, as its basis, from which it reasons and concludes. Mathematical theorems, and logical propositions, give clear demonstrations, and necessary conclusions: and thus other sciences. But, *history*, and the *origin* of tribes and nations, have hitherto been covered with a great deal of obscurity. Some antient historians were ignorant; others prejudiced. Some searchers into antiquities adopted the traditional tales of their predecessors: and others looking with contempt on the origin of tribes and societies, altogether exploded them, without investigation. My design is, to examine, and if possible, ascertain the genealogy and descent of the Indians, and to omit nothing that may in the least contribute to furnish the public with a full INDIAN SYSTEM.

In tracing the origin of a people, where there are no records of any kind, either written, or engraved, who rely solely on oral tradition for the support of their antient usages, and have lost great part of them—though the undertaking be difficult, yet where several particulars, and circumstances, strong and clear, correspond, they not only make room for conjecture, but cherish probability, and till better can be offered, must be deemed conclusive.

All the various nations of Indians, seem to be of one descent; they call a buffalo, in their various dialects, by one and the same name, “*Yanasa*.” And there is a strong similarity of religious rites, and of civil and martial customs, among all the various American nations of Indians we