

XI. *Particulars relative to the Nature and Customs of the Indians of North-America. By Mr. Richard M<sup>c</sup> Caustrand, Surgeon to the King's or Eighth Regiment of Foot. Communicated by Joseph Planta, Esq. Sec. R. S.*

Read February 16, 1786.

**I**T has been advanced by several travellers and historians that the Indians of America differed from other males of the human species in the want of one very characteristic mark of the sex, to wit, that of a beard. From this general observation, the Esquimaux have been excepted; and hence it has been supposed, that they had an origin different from that of the other natives of America. Inferences have also been drawn, not only with respect to the origin, but even relative to the conformation of Indians, as if this was in its nature more imperfect than that of the rest of mankind.

It appears somewhat singular that authors, in deducing the origin both of the Esquimaux and of the other Indians of America from the old world, should never have explained to us how the former came to retain their beards, and the latter to lay them aside. To ascertain the authenticity of this point may perhaps prove of little real utility to mankind; but the singularity of the fact certainly claims the attention of the curious: and as it is impossible to fix any limits to the inferences

rences which may at one time or another be drawn from alledged facts, it must always be of consequence to inquire into the authenticity of those facts, how little interesting foever they may at present appear.

I will not by any means take upon me to say that there are not nations of America destitute of beards ; but ten years residence at Niagara, in the midst of the Six-Nations (with frequent opportunities of seeing other nations of Indians) has convinced me, that *they* do not differ from the rest of men, in this particular, more than one European differs from another : and as this imperfection has been attributed to the Indians of North-America, equally with those of the rest of the Continent, I am much inclined to think, that this assertion is as void of foundation in one region as it is in the other.

All the Indians of North-America (except a very small number, who, from living among white people, have adopted their customs) pluck out the hairs of the beard ; and as they begin this from its first appearance, it must naturally be supposed, that to a superficial observer their faces will seem smooth and beardless. As further proof that they have beards, we may observe, first, that they all have an instrument for the purpose of plucking them out. Secondly, that when they neglect this for any time, several hairs sprout up, and are seen upon the chin and face. Thirdly, that many Indians allow tufts of hair to grow upon their chins or upper lips, resembling those we see in different nations of the old world. Fourthly, that several of the Mohocks, Delawares, and others, who live amongst white people, sometimes shave with razors, and sometimes pluck their beards out. These are facts which are notorious amongst the Army, Indian-Traders, &c. ; and which

are never doubted in that part of the world by any person in the least conversant with Indians: but as it is difficult to transport a matter of belief from one country to another distant one, and as the authors who have maintained the contrary opinion are too respectable to be doubted upon light grounds, I by no means intend to rest the proofs upon what has been said, or upon my single assertion.

I have provided myself with two authorities, which I apprehend may in this case be decisive. One is Colonel BUTLER, Deputy Superintendant of Indian Affairs, well known in the late American war, whose great and extensive influence amongst the Six-Nations could not have been acquired by any thing less than his long and intimate knowledge of them and their language. The other authority is that of THAYENDANEGA, commonly known by the name of Captain JOSEPH BRANT, a Mohock Indian of great influence, and much spoken of in the late war. He was in England in 1775, and writes and speaks the English language with tolerable accuracy. I shall therefore only subjoin their opinions upon this matter, the originals of which I have under their own signatures.

#### Colonel BUTLER'S.

THE men of the Six-Nation Indians have all beards naturally, as have all the other nations of North-America which I have had an opportunity of seeing. Several of the Mohocks shave with razors, as do likewise many of the Panees who are kept as slaves by the Europeans. But in general the Indians pluck out the beard by the roots from its earliest appearance; and as their faces are therefore smooth, it has been supposed that they were destitute of beards. I am even of opinion, that  
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if the Indians were to practise shaving from their youth, many of them would have as strong beards as Europeans.

(Signed)

Niagara, April 12, 1784.

JOHN BUTLER.  
Agent of Indian Affairs.

Captain BRANT's.

THE men of the Six-Nations have all beards by nature; as have likewise all other Indian nations of North America which I have seen. Some Indians allow a part of the beard upon the chin and upper lip to grow, and a few of the Mohocks shave with razors in the same manner as Europeans; but the generality pluck out the hairs of the beard by the roots as soon as they begin to appear; and as they continue this practice all their lives, they appear to have no beard, or at most only a few straggling hairs which they have neglected to pluck out. I am however of opinion, that if the Indians were to shave they would never have beards altogether so thick as the Europeans; and there are some to be met with who have actually very little beard.

(Signed)

JOS. BRANT THAYENDANEGA.

Niagara, April 19, 1783.

Upon this subject I shall only further observe, that it has been supposed by some, that this appearance of beard on Indians arises only from a mixture of European blood; and that an Indian of pure race is intirely destitute of it. But the nations, amongst whom this circumstance can have any influence, bear so small a proportion to the multitude who are unaffected  
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by it, that it cannot by any means be considered as the cause; nor is it looked upon as such either by Captain BRANT or Colonel BUTLER.

I shall here subjoin a few particulars relative to the Indians of the Six-Nations, which, as they seem not to be well understood even in America, are probably still less known in Europe. My authorities upon this subject, as well as upon the former, are the Indian Captain BRANT and Colonel BUTLER.

Each nation is divided into three or more tribes; the principal of which are called the Turtle-tribe, the Wolf-tribe, and the Bear-tribe.

Each tribe has two, three, or more chiefs, called Sachems; and this distinction is always hereditary in the family, but descends along the female line: for instance, if a chief dies, one of his sister's sons, or one of his own brothers, will be appointed to succeed him. Among these no preference is given to proximity or primogeniture; but the Sachem, during his life-time, pitches upon one whom he supposes to have more abilities than the rest; and in this choice he frequently, though not always, consults the principal men of the tribe. If the successor happens to be a child, the offices of the post are performed by some of his friends until he is of sufficient age to act himself.

Each of these posts of Sachem has a name which is peculiar to it, and which never changes, as it is always adopted by the successor; nor does the order of precedency of each of these names or titles ever vary. Nevertheless, any Sachem, by abilities and activity, may acquire greater power and influence in the nation

than those who rank before him in point of precedency; but this is merely temporary, and dies with him.

Each tribe has one or two chief warriors, which dignity is also hereditary, and has a peculiar name attached to it.

These are the only titles of distinction which are fixed and permanent in the nation; for although any Indian may by superior talents, either as a counsellor or as a warrior, acquire influence in the nation, yet it is not in his power to transmit this to his family.

The Indians have also their *Great Women* as well as their *Great Men*, to whose opinions they pay great deference; and this distinction is also hereditary in families. They do not sit in council with the Sachems, but have separate ones of their own.

When war is declared, the Sachems and great Women generally give up the management of public affairs into the hands of the warriors. It may however so happen, that a Sachem may at the same time be also a chief warrior.

Friendships seem to have been instituted with a view towards strengthening the union between the several nations of the confederacy; and hence *Friends* are called the sinews of the Six-Nations. An Indian has therefore generally one or more *friends* in each nation. Besides the attachment which subsists during the life-time of the two friends, whenever one of them happens to be killed, it is incumbent on the survivor to *replace* him, by presenting to his family either a scalp, a prisoner, or a belt consisting of some thousands of wampum; and this ceremony is performed by every *friend* of the deceased.

The purpose and foundation of war parties therefore, is in general, to procure a prisoner or scalp to replace the friend or relation of the Indian who is the head of the party. An Indian

dian who wishes to replace a friend or relation presents a belt to his acquaintance, and as many as chuse to follow him accept this belt, and become his party. After this, it is of no consequence whether he goes on the expedition or remains at home (as it often happens that he is a child), he is still considered as the head of the party. The belt he presented to his party is returned fixed to the scalp or prisoner, and passes along with them to the friends of the person he replaces. Hence it happens, that a war party, returning with more scalps or prisoners than the original intention of the party required, will often give one of these supernumerary scalps or prisoners to another war party whom they meet going out; upon which this party, having fulfilled the purpose of their expedition, will sometimes return without going to war.

