

3. Jean-Bernard Bossu Advises Newcomers on the Way to Health in Louisiana, 1762

... Since it is natural for man to want to live a long time, I think that it would be appropriate for me, with my experience, to indicate briefly the way to conserve and prolong life in America.

I shall finish my letter with a little dissertation on cures. . . . I am certain that you will agree with me, sir, that perfect health is brought about by exercise and sobriety.

Jean-Bernard Bossu, *Travels in the Interior of North America, 1751-1762*, trans. and ed. Seymour Feiler (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962): 217-220.

When Europeans first came here 260 years ago, the Indians had neither wine nor brandy. The natives, as I have already said, lived on dried and smoked game, roasted or boiled with corn ground in a hardwood mortar. This food, called chili, is very tasty and healthful. When I went up the Mobile River with the Indians, I lived for about two months on this food. I can assure you that I never felt better than I did during that period. The best of all the Latin proverbs is: *Plures gula occidit quam gladius*.^{*} Voluptuousness and intemperance in eating and drinking kill more people than the sword. You should lead a life of moderation, especially in the warm regions of America.

First of all, you must allow yourself to become slowly accustomed to the climate, and you must avoid all fruit and liquor until your body gradually becomes adjusted. People with a great deal of blood should have some drawn from time to time to prevent apoplexy, and gentle laxatives should be taken occasionally. You should avoid exposing yourself to the burning heat of the sun and to the wind.

When you have drunk too much wine, eat things with acid in them, such as lemons, which are plentiful here. This will clear your head and keep the vapors from getting you drunk after meals. If you become overheated because you have drunk too much liquor, take something refreshing and be careful not to eat hot food. Spirits should be drunk as little as possible because they burn the blood and cause high fever.

When you have eaten too much, strong liquor is good for fortifying the stomach and aiding digestion, but if, on the other hand, you are overheated because you have drunk too much, alcohol can become very dangerous.^{**} Those who drink to excess are almost always tormented by fantastic dreams which tire them so much that their minds become disturbed. The wine fumes in their bodies excite their imagination. We know from experience that sober people, especially those who drink water, sleep peacefully, without waking too easily or falling into a stupor . . .

After overeating, if you feel so stuffed and lethargic that the nutritive juices bloat and exhaust your entire body, I believe you would do well to imitate the Indians, who find sweating an infallible cure. Increasing the heat of the body is a certain cure, if done at the first signs of discomfort. Europeans who use the perspiration cure lie between two blankets and cover themselves completely, except for their faces. They do not get up until they have perspired for a full hour. When this treatment is continued for several days, the patient's recovery is so remarkable that he regains his strength and his appetite. He is surprised to find himself agile and alert once again. Perspiring purifies the internal organs painlessly and naturally. Ordinary medicines cannot do this. In order to remain healthy, one should undergo this treatment three times a year: in spring, summer, and winter. My conclusion, sir, is that diet and sweating are general cures.

I would say that nature ought to be our guide in everything and should teach us the true means of remaining in good health. Otherwise, we are condemned to great suffering and even to death. I have already mentioned that the North American Indians' great physical activity, such as dancing, ball-playing, hunting, fishing, and fighting, overheats them so that they perspire and thus eliminate body waste. Why

^{*}"The gullet kills as many people as the sword."—ED.

^{**}I should mention that since the Americans have begun to drink wine and liquor, they have shortened their lives, just as we have.

do the peasants live so long and remain healthy without the aid of doctors? It is because of their work and exercise that they do not have the gout, kidney stones, and other infirmities to which wealthy Europeans are prone because they eat rich food and walk as rarely as do sick old men. I have known some of them who have turned their stomachs into a drug store.

It has been observed that young people who migrate from Europe to the warm regions of America die more quickly than the old. This is because the young eat all kinds of fruit which cause diarrhea. Very little fruit should be eaten until the body becomes accustomed to the climate of the country. After one year there is no further inconvenience of this sort.

If these precautions are taken, I am sure that one could live longer in the New World than in the Old. There are at present a number of people in Louisiana who have been there since the founding of the colony. I have met a settler named Graveline who is 118 years old. He came here with Monsieur d'Iberville in 1698 and served as a soldier in Canada for about thirty years during the reign of Louis XIV. . . .