

# The Athenian Mercury:

Tuesday, April 28. 1691.

Quest. 1. *Whether a tender Friendship between two Persons of a different Sex can be innocent?*

*Ans.* I look upon the groundless suspicions so common in relation to matters of this nature, as base as they are wicked, and chiefly owing to the vice and lewdness of the Age, which makes some persons believe all the World as wicked as themselves. The Gentleman who proposes this question seems of a *far different Character*, and one who deserves that happiness which he mentions; for whose satisfaction, or theirs who desire it, we affirm, That such a Friendship is not *only innocent*, but commendable, and as advantageous as delightful. *A strict Union of Souls, as has been formerly asserted, is the Essence of Friendship. Souls have no Sexes*, nor while those only are concerned can any thing that's criminal intrude. 'Tis a Conversation *truly Angelical*, and has so many charms in't, that the Friendships between *man and man* deserve not to be compared with it. The very Souls of the fair Sex, as well as their Bodies, seem to have a *softer turn* than those of Men, while we reckon our selves Possessors of a more solid Judgment and stronger Reason, or rather may with more Justice pretend to greater Experience, and more advantages to improve our Minds; nor can any thing on Earth give a greater or *purser Pleasure* than communicating such knowledge to a capable Person, who if of another Sex, by the *Charms* of her Conversation *inexpressibly sweetens* the pleasant *Labours*, and by the advantage of a *fine Mind and good Genius* often starts such Notions as the *Instructor* himself would otherwise never have thought of. All the fear is least the Friendship should in time *degenerate*, and the Body come in for a share with the Soul, as it did among *Beccalins Poetesses and Vertuosis*, which if it once does, *Farewel Friendship*, and most of the Happiness arising from it.

Quest. 2. *Whether, since Mermen and Mermaids have more of the humane shape than other Fishes, they may be thought to have more Reason?*

*Ans.* According to our promise in Numb. 8. we shall shew you first what may most probably be thought of their *Nature and Production*; some think 'em not to be Creatures *ab initio*, but Monsters got since by unnatural Copulation; some think 'em to be very *Devils* from the strange Effects attributed to 'em; some that when the Angels fell, those that light in the Sea were turned into *Mermen*; and some, that the Devils begat them of Fishes; some, that Fishes, generating in the Deluge, and seeing drowned men, by strength of Imagination got something like 'em. But we see no reason but that they were created at first amongst that infinite number of other Fishes in the Sea, which bear some resemblance to the Creatures on Earth. *Alexander ab Alexandro* affirms he has known a *Merman* steal a Woman *Causa concubitu*, which if truth, strengthens the Argument. *Ferdinand Alvarez*, Secretary to the store-house of the *Indians*, says, he saw a young *Merman* come out of the Water to steal fishes from the Fishermen, and eat 'em. *Olaus magnus* says many things of 'em, but his Credit is questionable. *Philosoph. Tratt.* mentions a *Merman* taken in a River in *Virginia* with a *Pyramidal Head* and fish Tail. In our English Chronicles 'tis affirmed a Man-fish was taken in *Suffolk*, kept six Months on shore, and stole again to Sea; but the most authentick and particular Relation we meet with is in the *History of the Netherlands*, viz. The *Dikes* were broken near *Campen* by an *Inundation* in 1493. and when the *Inundation* returned, a *Merwoman* was left in *Dermert Mere*, and the Milkmaids who us'd to cross that *Mere* with Boats when they went to milk, saw a humane Head above water, but believed their eyes deceived 'em, till the repeated sight confirmed their assurance, whereupon they resolved one night to watch her, and saw that she repaired to a *Seggy* or *flaggy* place, where it was ebb and near the

side; whereupon, early in the Morning they got a great many Boats together, and environed the place in the form of a half Moon, and disturbed her, but she attempting to get under the Boats, and finding her way stopt up by staves and other things on purpose fastned, began to flounce and make an hideous deafning Noise, and with her Hands and Tail *sunk a Boat* or two, but at last was tyred out and taken; the Maids used her kindly, and cleansed the Sea-Moss and Shells from off her, and offered her Water, Fish, Milk, Bread, &c. which she refused, but with good usage in a day or two, they got her to eat and drink, though she endeavoured to make her escape again to Sea; her Hair was long and black, her Face humane, her Teeth very strong, her Breasts and Belly to her Navel were perfect; the lower parts of her Body ended in a strong *fish Tail*. The Magistrates of *Harlem* commanded her to be sent to them, for that the *Mere* was in their Jurisdiction: When she was brought thither, she was put into the Town-house, and had a *Dame* assigned to her to teach her. *She learnt to Spin and show Devotion at Prayer*, she would laugh, and when Women came into the Town-house to spin with her for diversion, she would signify by signs she knew their meaning in some sort, though she could never be taught to speak. She would wear no Cloths in Summer; part of her Hair was fillited up in a *Dutch Dress*, and part hang'd long and Naturally. She would have her Tail in the Water, and accordingly had a Tub of Water under her Chair made on purpose for her. She eat Milk, Water, Bread, Butter and Fish; she lived thus out of her Element (*except her Tail*) fifteen or sixteen years: Her Picture was painted on a Board with Oyle, and hangs now in the Town-house of *Harlem*, with a Subscription in Letters of Gold, giving an Account when she was taken, how long she lived, and when she died, and in what Church-yard she was buried. Their *Annals* mention her, and their Books have her Picture; and travelling Painters draw her Picture by the Table. By the above mentioned Relation the Querist may be satisfied that she exceeds all other Creatures in cunning and docility, that have ever yet been known, and probably by her burial might be reckoned in the *Classis of Rationals*, by the Magistrates who knew her Life, and suffered a place in the Church-yard for her *Interment*.

Quest. 3. *Whether a Man that is turned out of his Employ, and exposed to Necessity with a Wife and Children, may not lawfully revenge himself on his Supplanter to regain his Post, rather than suffer himself, his Wife and Children to starve?*

*Ans.* The Enjoyment of any thing got ill is a *greater Curse* than the want of the thing so enjoyned. - 'Tis not an Estate can make me happy, but the good use of it, and the happiness consists (I mean all we can expect in this World) in the reflections of *vertuous Actions done*, with the hopes of following Rewards. It is inconsistent with the Nature of the Divine Essence to *sanctifie an ill Action* to good ends, and therefore has commanded *we should do no Evil that good may come of it*; and if God won't make us happy in an ill way, we cannot expect the Creature should. We are forbid to kill without limitations or presidents of this Nature; he then that disobeyes, forfeits his dependance by acting of himself; and he that will be independent, and *run from the Providence of God*, will find himself at a loss to speed better elsewhere, or how to dispose of himself. I ought to endeavour well, and leave the success to God, who often redresses our *Miseries* when we think they are most desperate. "I take great Pleasure" (says the Author of *Religio Bibliopola*, page 17.) some-  
times to find my self entangled in Difficulties and Dangers, out of which I have no skill to extricate my self.  
"I never think my self safer than in such a Labyrinth of thwarting Events as no Clue of my own Reason or Experience"

“perience can lead me out. ’Tis then I can be chearful  
“and triumph, knowing my deliverance is near at hand.  
“And herein lyes the quintessence of my Comfort, that  
“I am thus particularly and demonstratively assured of  
“the Divine Favour and Protection, since nothing below  
“a Miracle of Prudence could untye so knotty a juncture  
“of Affairs. The Querist must meet with this Answer  
publickly, therefore has taken the surest way to be found  
out, if his Supplanter is killed, and he regains his post by  
Murder.

Quest. 4. *What is Melancholly? — what are the Symptoms, Causes and Cure thereof?*

Ans. This Question were fitter for a *Profess’d Physician* than for such as pretend no more than in a short Essay to satisfy the *Curious*: However, least the Gentleman who proposes it shou’d, as Melancholly Persons use to do, grow worse if he’s not *humour’d*, we’ll give the best description of the Disease we can find, and so much of the Cure of it as may be expected in a Paper of this Nature: Not then to transcribe all *Burton*, I know not but that Description of Melancholly which some great Men give us may be full and satisfactory: that ‘tis — *A Raving without Fever or Fury, with Fear and Sadness* — ’tis seated in the brain and Heart — the disaffection of one makes Persons rave, of the other renders ‘em sad or fearful: The Fancy is always busy, for the most part intent on one thing, and the *Idæas* appear improper, distorted and horrid: The Juices of the Body contracting an acid and corrosive disposition, and thereby throwing all things out of Order — The Vital Spirits grow dull and languid, and the Blood little less than stagnates about the Heart.

The *Effects* thereof we may see in *Bedlam* every day: They are as various as the *Freaks* of the unguided Fancy, which are almost infinite — Or as the particular Causes thereof, *Jealousie, Superstition, Love, Despair*, and sometimes even a fit of violent *Passion* or *Anger*, which is one Degree beyond *Melancholly*, even a short *Madness*. All the *Cure* that belongs to us to prescribe is *Diversion*, which reaches both Cases. If the Brain be disaffected with deep thinking on one particuar Object, turn the stream if possible to something else, *Flatter, humour*, or do what you can for the same End — For *Sadness*, or a deep lumpish temper, *Fear* is the best *Cure*, which rouzes the mind, and if not carry’d too high, sets the lazy Spirits on work to throw off the impending Evil, and thereby assists Nature in what else she has to do. For the *Therapeutick* part, the Colledge will prescribe better, though scarce cheaper Remedies.

Quest. 5. *Whether of the two is the more serviceable Weapon, the Gun or the Bow?*

Ans. I confess the Arguments of the Gentleman who proposes this Question, the Judgment of some not contemptible Writers, the Experience of former Ages, and perhaps as much as any, a natural fondness towards that ancient Weapon, by the help whereof our valiant Ancestors have won so many famous Victories, would incline rather to the latter than the former. In effect our *Histories* tell us that our *Bowmen* and *Archers* had generally the greatest share in our ancient Victories, they being some of the best and strongest in the World: That of *Agincourt*, wherein we fought with more than six times our Number, was almost entirely owing to the *Gray-goose-wing*, it being a whole Body of Archers who let drive their whole flight together on the Flank of the *French Horse*, which got us the day. The *Parthians* also ‘tis true, seldom fought the *Romans*, but they gave ‘em enough on ‘t, and their main Excellency and chief Strength were their *Archers*. ‘Tis further own’d by all who understand it, that one *Archer* shall deliver six *Arrows* ere a *Musqueteer* can charge or discharge: That a flight of *Arrows* in the Air are a terrible thing, no part of the adverse Army being secure, but all expecting where the deadly shower will light. A *Gen*, a *Musquet* much oftner fails than a *Bow*, nor is a *Bullet* so troublesome in the Body as an *Arrow*, nor appears half so terrible. To conclude, were it not that the World has generally disus’d this way of fighting, who are seldom guilty of forgetting the best Methods for destroying one another, we should

absolutely conclude for the *Bow* in all Cases, and at least venture to affirm, that against *Horse* it seems to be a much better Weapon than the other.

Quest. 6. *If the Devil should take Louis le Grand, what would become of the French King?*

Ans. The *French King* loves *Louis le Grand* too well to forsake his Company.

Quest. 7. *What is the Philosophers Stone, and what its Nature and Qualities?*

Ans. For the Resolution of this Question, see our *Athenian Mercury*, Numb. 3.

Quest. 8. *Is the Light a Body?*

Ans. Light is not a Body no more than Heat, both are *Accidents* to one Substance, I mean the Sun, and if the Sun were not, there would be neither of them; if it be objected that we have Light when the Sun is under the Earth, and incapable of giving light by means of the Earths interposition betwixt it and us; we Answer, it is a mistake, for the Sun is then capable of giving light primarily, and by reflection from the Earth upon the Moon and Stars, and they as secondary Causes lend that light to us which they borrow from the Sun.

### Advertisements.

Continue to send your New Questions to Mr. Smith’s Coffee-house in Stocks-market till the 30th of April, and no longer, for by that time we shall have received Questions enough (with what is already sent us) to fill up our first Volume, which as soon as printed, Publick Notice shall be given, that so all Curious inquirers may again send in their New Questions; but pray pay the Postage, or they will not be taken in.

We hear nothing more of our Astrologer, but as soon as ever we do, the Reader may expect an Account of it.

The two Questions about the Marriage of Courzen Germans shall be Answered next Saturday.

We have received this Week 44 Questions in French — as also several Nice Questions concerning Agues, Wisdom, Kentish-men, the Irish Massacre, &c. all which shall be Answered at or before the End of the Volume — Likewise those 4 Questions that have given the Querist (as he says) many sorrowful hours, shall speedily be Answered, and we hope to his full satisfaction.

The several Nice and Curious Questions sent us this last Week by Mr. Tho. Brown and others, shall be Answered as the End of the Volume.

The Gentleman that sent a Scheme from Cambridge, has (we conceive) mistaken himself in making the Circles less in Number than the Squares, if he please to let us know by another Letter, we will endeavour a Solution.

\* \* \* That nothing might be wanting to render our Athenian Project serviceable to the Publick, and thoroughly known, we shall again give an Account of what we design’d from our very first engaging in it — which was not only to confine our selves to Answer all manner of Theological and other Questions whatever that shall be sent us, fit for a Resolution, (which shall also be perform’d from Week to Week either in single Numbers, or at the end of every Volume, for the Reasons hinted in Numb. 2.) but also to give Accounts of most Books transmitted to us from Foreign Parts, in Order whereto we have settled a Correspondence beyond Sea being resolved to spare no Charges to gratifie the Ingenious.

We design also to insert the Transactions and Experiments of several English Virtuoso’s, and what ever else is CURIOUS that shall be sent us from time to time, and to transcribe (that so we may the more fully make good our Title) from the *Acta Eruditorum Lipsiæ*, the *Paris Journal des Scavans*, the *Giornali de Letterati*, Printed at Rome and the Universal Historical Bibliothek, &c. all that we conceive will be lookt upon here as valuable — ALL which we intend to add (together with our Answers to Objections) at the end of every Volume, they being Licensed and Enter’d, and now Translating in order to it.

We shall all along publish every Volume (with a Preface and Index to it) as soon as ever we have received Questions enough to fill up Numb. 30. that so those Querists that stay longest for Answers may not think us tedious.

This Paper will be Publisht every Tuesday and Saturday, the Authors of it having Obliged themselves to be constant to those two dayes.

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