

The Athenian Mercury:

Saturday, May 23. 1691.

The several Questions lately sent us by a young Gentlewoman shall be here answered all together, according to our Promise in our last Mercury.

Quest. 1. **W** Hether Beauty be real or imaginary?

Ans. We dare almost venture to affirm 'tis both. Custom and Opinion it must of necessity be own'd, go a great way towards making a Deformity or a Beauty, and how shall we certainly know whether's in the right? — He that abuses the Negro for his flat Nose and thick Lips; or the Negro who abuses him for his thin Lips and high Nose? Nay, we need not go so far as Guinea, for in the Families of the first Prince of Europe, to be born without such a Lip as we generally think none of the best, wou'd be esteem'd a great Deformity, not to say worse: — And indeed every where Fancy has a large stroke in these matters, Lucretius his witty Observation *Parvula punctione xos. q. w. pia*, &c. holding almost all the World over — Nor has Complexion any better Fate then proportion, one who is born white among the Blacks, being as great a Monster as a Black among those that are white, and the Abyssines wou'd perswade us that Adam and Eve were Blacks, and that the Queen of Sheba was of that Colour they make almost an Article of their Creed. However, as Exceptions don't spoil a Rule, and as 'tis no Argument there's no such thing as the Law of Nature, because some Nations have no regard to't, so in this Case, there must be a best somewhere, White is lovely and Black horrid, one resembling the light the other darkness. In these things therefore we place Beauty — namely — Features, Proportion, Complexion, Meine and Air. There is such a thing as a good Feature, taken by it self, some things being shaped more neat, cleaverly and handsome than others, as we may grossly see in a Horse compared with an Elephant, a Gray-hound with a Swine or Cur. And this is something in Nature, independent from the Judgment or Fancy of any Man; for these Relations wou'd in themselves be, though there were no Man in the World to make the Comparison; nay, an Elephant wou'd be a clumsy shapeless thing, tho' there shou'd be no Horse to be compared with it; as a Horse would be neat and cleaverly limb'd, tho, there were no such thing in being as an Ass or an Elephant: Now this Feature, as it is a real Beauty, so 'tis distinct even from Proportion, tho' very near akin to it: For example — We see commonly enough Persons who have some good Features — a Nose, Mouth, Chin, &c. whereas the rest may either be Deform'd or Unproportionable, not bearing that due regard of situation or magni-

tude one to another, which at first sight appear pleasing and natural. And indeed what that is, as in other Cases yet to come, the Eye seems to be the sole Judge; nor is't easie to describe and fix it, tho' we believe it possible to be done; and if any way, by the Proportions of Musick, that proportion infallibly pleasing the Eye in visible Objects which does the Ear in Audible. For the two last parts of Beauty, a good Meine and good Air — with the French, from whence we had the Terms — *Belle Air*, and *Bonne Mine*; they may more easily be distinguish'd than describ'd, tho' both generally confounded. A good Meine relates to all the Body, a fine Air to the Face only. A good Meine is but of one sort, and more easily described than an Air: It signifies — the handsome appearance some People make when you take 'em all together; 'tis as we may call it, the good Air of the Body, as a good Air (taken in a strict sense) the good Meine of the Face. And this, tho' there may be something of it in Nature, yet we chiefly think owing to Education and Converse: Whereas a good Air is various, perfectly Natural, and impossible to be given by all the Art in the World — For a Man may skrew his Face into a form of Terror, and think he looks Majestical, when he has a little sneaking Phiz, or sweet when he's really fowr and ill natured — but 'twill still be unnatural, and he'll look as ill disguised as the Ass in the Lyons-skin, when his long Ears stuck out and betray'd him. And hence we may remark that chief difference in what we call a good Air, sometimes we see a Face with Lines of Majesty in't, that like *Cesar's* or *Gustavus Adolphus* dazles all that beholds it, and is so sharp and piercing, that 'tis almost insupportable: At other times we meet with such an incomparable sweetness (mostly residing in the Mouth and Eyes, tho' the whole turn of the Face contributes something to't) that it charms all that see it, and those who have it, we rather call pretty than beautiful, since 'tis often found where there's hardly one good feature. Now 'tis a rare Happiness indeed to see a Face at once both Sweet and Majestical, tho' when discover'd they Conquer the World — What then must they do when the Owners of 'em have the advantages of a good Mein, good Features, just Proportion, and a fine Complexion? If we are askt what Proportion these several Excellencies bear one towards another, we shou'd thus give our Judgment — Complexion the least, for that soonest fades, Fools often have it, 'tis as often not Natural, and we are not agreed which is best. We rank good Features in the next place, with which may be reckon'd Proportion, since if general, one can't be without the other. Better than both appears a good Mein, as it lasts longer, and recommends more, especially in a Man, where the Face is no great Matter: Best of all a good Air, because when good Mein and Complexion fails, when there is some times little that we can like either in Feature or Proportion, this always lasts, and nothing but Death, we had almost said hardly that it self, can alter or destroy it.

Quest. 2. *If a Man, &c. what's the Sin? &c. The Lady who sent it knows the rest of the Question.*

Ans. None at all that we know of, unless it be a Sin against decency. To illustrate it by a familiar Instance: When a Man is at his own Table, after Grace is said, immediately to fall to, without ever sitting down, or unfolding his Napkin, is no Sin; but 'tis either a sign he is very rude or extream sharp set, that he can't persuade Colon to stay one minute longer till the usual Formalities are over.

Quest. 3. *If a Gentlewoman who is at Years of Discretion, has been educated at a great distance from her Relations, who always left her to her own management.—After an Honourable Courtship made, and an equal Return express'd and confirm'd by Vows: Whether the Rules of Duty can free her from the Engagement solemnly contracted?*

Ans. The meaning of the Question I suppose is: *Whether in the case thus stated a Parents disallowing such Vows or Contracts, does really annul 'em or not.* The Reason of the difficulty is from that in the 30th. of Numbers, the 3, 4, and 5. verses. *If a Woman vow a vow unto the Lord in her Fathers House in her Youth, and her Father hear the vow, and shall hold his peace at her, her vows shall stand: But if her Father disallow her in the day that he hear-eth, not any of her Vows shall stand.* Which positive Institution is plainly grounded on a Law of Nature, viz. That Children before they are at Years of Discretion, are to be disposed of by Parents. But in this case, if it be fairly stated, there is hardly one of those Circumstances and Limitations, which are with infinite Wisdom inserted in the Text, which may give a Parent such a power over her Child. 'Tis there said if a Woman vow a vow to the Lord. The present case supposes a Contract with man, and tho' God disposes of his own right, it does not appear that he does so of anothers. The next circumstance is, if this Vow be made while she's in her Fathers House, which supposes two things, that she's provided for by her Father, and disposed of by him in all her Actions. The first of these in the present Case is left doubtful, the second laid in the Negative, the Lady being Educated at a distance, and left to her own management. The last remarkable difference is, that the Text supposes this Vow made by the Woman in her Youth, which may without straining be interpreted before she come to Years of Discretion, or the time when the Law makes her of Age, whereas the Question affirms the Lady otherwise. Now there being so many remarkable Differences between the Text and the Case proposed, and there being no other place in the Bible which affects it, we can by no means from thence prove the power of the Parent to disannul any such Vow, the contrary being rather insinuated by the Exceptions made, every one of which come up fully to the Case in hand.

Quest. 4. *Whether it be lawful to look with pleasure on another woman than ones Wife when Married, or others besides her we intend to make so before?*

Ans. 'Tis dangerous, the Eye being the Burning-glass of Love, and looking, liking, desiring, attempting, and criminally obtaining, oftentimes or always follow one another. But were it possible to stop at liking, which is the last step that can be made short of a precipice, we can't affirm that in its own Nature unlawful. For whatever is fair and proportionable, must of necessity strike the Eye with more pleasure than what's deformed and horrid.

Quest. *Why are Children ofner like the Father than the Mother?*

Ans. The Similitude is perhaps very often owing to the Good women who are present at the Gossiping; but supposing for once the Truth of matter of Fact, it may easily enough be accounted for: because 'tis the Imagination of the Mother, not the Father, which forms the Child: And she having the Idea of the Fathers Face, not her own in her mind, that of the Child may be form'd accordingly like him, not her.

Quest. 6. *Whether it be proper for Women to be Learned?*

Ans. All grant that they may have some Learning, but the Question is of what sort, and to what Degree? Some indeed think they have Learn'd enough, if they can distinguish between their Husbands Breaches and another mans: But those who have no more wit than this comes to, will be in danger of distinguishing yet further, or else not at all. Others think that they may pardonably enough read, but by no means be trusted with writing; and others again, that they ought neither to write nor read. A Degree yet higher, are those who would have 'em read Plays, Novels, and Romances, with per-

haps a little History; but by all means are for terminating their Studies there, and not letting 'em meddle with the Edge-tools of Philosophy, for these wise Reasons, because forsooth it takes 'em off from their Domestick Affairs, and because it generally fills 'em too full of themselves, and makes 'em apt to despise others. For the first, it's true enough, that for the generality of Women it holds, who being obliged either to get their Livings by some industrious Employ, or stick close to Domestick Affairs, supposing her Mistress of an ordinary Family, can neither have time nor means to acquire such learning, or preserve it when it is once gotten: But this relates not to those whole Births and Fortunes exempt 'em from such circumstances: For Learning's make 'em conceited, and full of themselves, 'tis a weakness common to our own Sex as well as theirs: There's few Men who have Wit, Sense, or Learning, but they know it, tho' often they are so prudent to conceal such their Knowledge from the World. On the whole, since they have as noble Souls as we, a finer Genius, and generally quicker Apprehensions, we see no Reason why Women shou'd not be learned now, as well as Madam Philips, Van Schurman, and others have formerly been: For if we have seen one Lady gone mad with Learning, we mean a late Famous Countess, there are a hundred Men cou'd be named, whom the same Cause has rendred fit for Bedlam.

Quest. 7. *Why is it supposed by some, that Women have no Souls?*

Ans. They are a parcel of Fools for their pains; if any be so foolish and barbarous to make such a supposition: And the Reason why they think Women have no Souls, is because they have none themselves.

Quest. 8. *Whether an Army of Women would not conquer an Army of Men?*

Ans. That's much according to the Weapon they fight with. Their Eyes are dangerous, their Tongues very formidable, and he must be a bold man that dares encounter 'em at their own Weapons. But as for their Hands, there's no great Reason to fear 'em, unless when they come to be link'd in Matrimony.

Quest. 9. *What is Platonick Love?*

Ans. Nothing at all, unless it be Friendship, and of that see a former Answer.

Quest. 10. *Why are Common Women seldom or never with Child?*

Ans. Why does not the Grass grow in the path way?

Quest. 11. *Whether a Rook ever eats Carrion?*

Ans. The Gentleman who formerly proposed this Question, has lately sent us a Letter, wherein he appears so extreamly angry, that we dare not meddle with him, and therefore must desire him to take his Query back again, since we are resolv'd wee'll never answer it.

Quest. 12. *A. B. being a Feme Covert, and served with a Process of Subpoena, issued out of Chancery, barely directed to her self: Quere, Whether she is obliged to appear, and answer the Plaintiffs Bill; and in case she does not, what Remedy can the Plaintiff have against her Husband. Being abroad, I desire a Solution of this in your next Paper, that she may know what to do, the poverty of the Woman (she being not able to see Council for Advice) creates upon this Trouble?*

Ans. Were it at Common Law, undoubtedly she were not, but the Chancery being a Court of Equity, and consequently unlimited, and not obliged to observe those methods that Inferiour Courts must, in case of non-appearance, great inconvenience will necessarily ensue, tho' otherwise, if (upon notice taken of the contempt) an attachment should be awarded, yet upon motion by Council regularly made, the party pretendedly delinquent would be discharged.

Advertisements.

¶ Whereas the Questions we receive from the Fair Sex are both pressing and numerous, we being willing to oblige 'em, as knowing they have a very strong party in the World, resolve to set apart the first Tuesday in every month on purpose to satisfy Questions of that Nature.

* * In a late Question about annealing and painting Glass, &c. Mr. Winch in Breadstreet was only taken Notice of, whenas Mr. Halley's Name (who lives in Holbourn, over against Fetter-lane) was by some mistake left out, altho his Partner and Fellow Artist in those Admirable Curiosities: See Numb. 14.

We have received 13 Questions this Week from Cambridge, which will be answered as soon as may be.

All Persons are desired to forbear sending in any more Questions till we give publick notice that we have got all off our hands, which will be in a little time.