

# The Athenian Mercury.

Quest. 1. **W**Hether a Person unbaptized, is capable of Knighthood?

Ans. If the Proponent had subjoin'd another Question, viz. Of what use is the preceding Question, or what is design'd by it? his last had been sufficiently confoundative.—However we will not deny him one affirmative President as foreign as his meaning; the Romans had Three Orders of Knighthood without Baptism, viz. *Senatorius, Equestris & Plebeius*.

Quest. 2. Whether it be true, that Storks are never found but in Common-wealths? whether there were never any in England but in Oliver Cromwells Days? and if any be found, into what Country do they retire during the Winter?

Ans. For the first part of the Question, we answer it in the Negative, for these Reasons:

1. The Stork is mentioned frequently and familiarly in the Holy Scriptures, written under the Jewish Government when 'twas a Monarchy. Now 'tis not likely that Instances and Illustrations should be taken from a Creature that was not known amongst them. Moses gives Laws concerning them, and they build there in the Mount of Amana, a branch of Libanus to this day, as Bellondus tells us.

2. 'Twas common among the Romans under their Emperors, and mention'd in some Verses cited by Petronius Arbiter. 'Tis true, she's called *Peregrina*, a Stranger, but she's also called *Hospita*, a Guest, according to her Nature, which is to come and go agen, as do all those Season Birds. St. Ambrose also mentions it, and tells us the Romans called it, *Avis pia*, the Pious Bird, on account of the known care it takes of its Parents when old: and People use not to give Names to things they're not acquainted with. 'Tis besides mention'd as a usual Dish at the Roman Feasts, by Cornelius Nepos, and Pliny.

3. But yet more clearly: There were of them in *Thesaly* and *Egypt*, both Monarchies, for which we have the Testimony of *Plutarch* in *Iside*, and *Solinus* in *Thessalia*, and that they were anciently worship'd in both those places for the same Reason, namely devouring the numerous Serpents which breed in those Countries.

4. They are now frequent in the Turkish Empire, being the only one forbidden to be eaten in the Alcoran of all Water Fowl. For which the Mahometans give several wise Reasons; one because he eats Serpents, the other because he moves his Wings in Flying, like a Bird of Prey; we our selves may add a Third Reason more probable than both, why that cunning Impostor should forbid it, namely, because it devours Frogs, as the Fable tells us, and *Bellonius de Aegypto*: Now Frogs are by the Alcoran reckon'd among the Five Sacred Animals which they are forbidden to kill, because they praise God, and sprinkled Abraham's Tomb with Water. *Vid. plur. apud L.L. Bochart. Hieroz. lib. 2.*

I think we have prov'd the first Supposition a mistake: Whether they were never in England, but in Oliver Cromwell's time, or whether here then, we confess our Ignorance; but if here then, I mean after his Establishment, the poor Birds were extremely mistaken, and found an Usurpation in seeking a Commonwealth.

As to what Countries they retire into, we may answer of them as of the other *Aves migratoria*, or Season Birds. Some have pleasantly enough thought they go to the Moon, or some of those distant Bodies; though most others shorten their Journey a little, and only send them to warmer Climates. But for the precise Place or Region, Pliny tells us, *adhuc incertum est*, 'tis not yet discovered.

St. Ambrose tells us, they go toward the East, (*circa orientem locis incertis*.) *Isidorus* comes nearer, and tells us, they betake themselves to Asia; and *Solinus* says the same, describing besides, the very Place and Field where they light, and tear those to pieces which arrive last of the Company. Let any who would be further satisfied, read *Gasper Heldelines* ingenious Panegyrick on this Bird.

Quest. 3. Why in England are so many mark'd with the Small Pox; and the Women generally more than

the Men, contrary to what we see in other parts of Europe.

Ans. The same Reason may be given for both these Observations; namely the Fairness of the English, and Thinness and Clearness of their Skins, and so proportionably of the Women, wherein are more easily made deep and lasting Scars and Impressions, than in darker Complexions or thicker Skins; or if not actually so, will at least appear so at a distance to the Beholders.

Quest. 4. An Author writes that a certain Man being asleep, a Mouse went into his Body, and was, after it had remained there some time, vomited up alive. Is this likely, or is it not more probable 'twould have gnaw'd his Intrails to pieces?

Ans. We ought to have known the Authors Name, that we might have made some guess at the credibility of the Story: Not that it appears utterly impossible; for we have an Instance (I think 'tis in the *Transactions of the Royal Society*.) of a Maid who Vomited up certain Creatures like Frogs and Newts, after 'twas guessed they had been a long time in her Stomach. Nor was there any necessity of his gnawing the Intrails of the Man, unless he himself were so poor and hungry, that he had nothing within for him to feed upon.

Quest. 5. The Temple of Solomon being one of the most Beautiful Edifices ever known, how came not the Heathens to reckon it among the Seven Wonders of the World?

Ans. The Heathens had a particular hatred for the Jews, as we find in *Tacitus* and other Historians, being so far from doing them Justice, that they write the most notorious and ridiculous Lies concerning them. And being both so enraged against them for worshipping the true God, when they were all, or most of them Idolaters; and besides, being on the other side, all of them esteemed as cursed, and enemies to God and themselves by the Jews, who were a People by themselves, and distinct from all the World: No wonder, I say, if for these Reasons the Pagan Writers took no care to register those Things which were remarkable to the Jewish Nation.

Quest. 6. Whether the true Reason of Ovid's Banishment were ever known?

Ans. If it be not, I think it may be by any who will but take the pains to look into his Whining Elegies.

From whence I am thus far of the same Mind with Mr. Dryden, that his having seen something more than ordinary in Augustus's Gardens, was partly the Reason thereof: For thus in his *Tristib. Eleg. 1. lib. 2. ad Augustum*.

*Cur aliquid vidi, cur noxia lumina feci,  
Cur imprudenti cognita culpa mihi est?*

And again a little lower,

*Inscius Aëleon vidit sine veste Dianam.*

But however, it appears from the same work, that either his Poetry was really one Cause of his Banishment, or which I rather believe, pretended as such by Augustus, to cover the true Reason; since Debauching manners was not such a heinous Crime in his Reign. And we have others who writ much more lewdly than he; See the forequoted Elegy.

*Carmina fecerunt ut me maresq; notaret, — Caesar, &c.*

Quest. 7. There's a certain Jesuit, who makes a parallel between Homer and Virgil, sometimes preferring one, sometimes the other; though he seems to give the advantage to Virgil, contrary to the Sentiments of the Antients, — your Sense thereupon. — The same Jesuit concludes, he had rather wish to be Homer than Virgil, but had rather have composed the *Aeneids* than the *Iliads* or *Odyssees*. How does this agree?

Ans.



*Ans.* We think him in the right in both Cases; *Virgil* was undoubtedly the more correct Poet; nor could any thing be more Majestick, Great or Just than his Thoughts almost always are. *Homer* it must be allowed has an Air of Antiquity, and kind of Natural Fierceness, which makes him very entertaining; but he wrote, for ought we can see, meerly on the strength of his own Genius, having no Footsteps before to direct him; nor had he that encouragement *Virgil* had; nor did he like him, live in one of the most polite Ages and Courts the World ever knew; but on the contrary, a Wandering Vagabond sort of a Life, among the Petty Republicks of Greece, not long after the end of the Fabulous Ages, with the wild and improbable Notions whereof he was very much tinctur'd; nor could it be otherwise. For these Reasons *Virgil* might easily make a better Poem than *Homer*, and has in Fact, I think done so, his *Aeneads* being much more correct than any of the other's Works; *Aeneas* his Descent into Hell, much finer than that of *Ulysses*, and managed too to better purpose; the neat Flattering the Emperor and Empress, and the praises of *Marcellus*, which almost deserve to outlive the World. But yet after all, we should (for once) be of the same side with the Jesuit, and desire to have been *Homer* rather than *Virgil*, the beginning of a thing in new Inventions being the better half, and the half in a sense more than the whole; and an imperfect Workman may be said to be more honourable than a perfect; since 'tis an easy matter to add to what is before invented. And 'tis evidently seen, that almost all along, *Virgil* grafted on the Stock of Honour. This we believe is the Jesuits meaning; or at least for these Reasons we should chuse to be of the same mind.

*Quest. 8.* There is another Jesuit in the Court of France, who boasted that he writ better Verses than *Virgil*; for which he was very much jeer'd by the Wits there. The Query is, whether such a thing were impossible to be done?

*Ans.* 'Twas like the modesty of a certain Order to pretend to't: 'Twas as impossible for him to perform it, as to prove the Society Honest Men; or not Patronizers of some Doctrins wherewith they have been charged. Ridiculing him was too light a Punishment; and he deserved little less than stoning, for Blaspheming that God of Verse, as one greatly and poetically calls him.

*Quest. 9.* Whether the Fourteenth Ode of the First Book of *Horace* be rightly interpreted of the Roman Commonwealth?

*Ans.* I see no Reason to the contrary; the Allegory seems carried on all through in the same sense, any other application appears strain'd and violent: Nor can I imagin what to pitch upon; *Virgil's* Ship indeed is mentioned in the Third Ode of the first Book, but seems no kin to this, nor can it be any better turn'd to any Amorous Sense, or be meant either of *Horace* or his Mistress. If the Gentleman who sent this Question, had given any other Interpretation than that which usually obtains, we would fairly have examined it, and are yet ready still to do it.

*Quest. 10.* Whether the Doctrin of Passive Obedience and Non-Resistance be absurd?

*Ans.* If strain'd to the height to which some have carried it, we think nothing can be more so: The Consequences which necessarily flow from it, are fatal and dangerous to Civil Society, and tend to the Destruction both of particular Men and all Government. One is, that perhaps not above an hundred Men, or many more, may destroy all Mankind; another Consequence no less unavoidable, which a Wag lately charg'd on the Doctrin is this. Suppose the Emperor *Nero* should have sent his Commands to all the Christians in his Dominions by those commissioned under him, to reduce 'em all to the same Condition he did *Sporus*, and for this pretend both the so much talk'd of Imperial Law, whereby he is irresistible, and the Canon of *St. Paul*, that all that resist, receive to themselves Damnation; would any one in that case think the Christians were obliged to Submit and Obey; and in a sense somewhat like that of *Origen*, be made Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Gods sake? (Yet is not this so much as suffering Death, whereunto some carry it.) so far from it, that the fix'd Laws of Nature and Nations was to be the measure of their Obedience. For the *Theban* Legion, and other Instances of that Nature, besides, that the Truth of them is justly questioned, we know some of the Primitive Christians were mad for Martyrdom, whom I hope we are not to follow, the Church having made a Canon expressly against them.

But besides, nothing can be a more unfair way of arguing, than to bring an Instance from *Souldiers*, who are under Military Discipline, and *Dead Men* at the Command of a General, to enforce such a sort of Obedience on those who are under stated Civil Laws, and a settled Government.

*Quest. 11.* What is a full and satisfactory Answer to any Question; because some are answered with a Magisterial and Contemptuous *Slur* instead of Reason, and others by begging the Question?

*Ans.* To begin with the latter end; If any such thing as objected can be proved, the Gentleman ought to have instanced. If we treat some Querists with Contempt, 'tis because they deserve it, and treat all Mankind at the same rate: But see more of this in the Preface to this first Volume. For a full and Satisfactory Answer, we take that to be so, which takes the very pinch of the Question, gives a clear account of Argument or Fact, and either Answers or precludes the main Objections, though not takes away all Cavils, which is impossible to be done.

*Quest. 12.* Whether there be any such thing as Nature?

*Ans.* The Schools have a barbarous distinction of *Natura Naturans*, & *Natura Naturata*, which 'tis impossible to make Good English of; but they mean thereby either the God, Author and Father of Nature; or that regular course of things and chain of Causes he has established in the Universe, which we more commonly call Nature. That there is such a thing, is as plain as the Terms are in which 'tis described.

*Quest. 13.* Whether there be Two Men in the World with an equal number of Hairs on their Head?

*Ans.* The Question is unreasonable, for it admits of neither Experiment nor Argument. 'Tis true, the Sacred Writ tells us, the very Hairs of our Head are all numbred; but they are so to him only, who is Infinite, and therefore we must not pretend to meddle with it.

*Quest. 14.* Whether Number is Infinite?

*Ans.* Discrete quantity is Infinite, much in the same manner that Continued is, namely in power, admitting innumerable additions as that does Divisions. Thus as nothing that has Quantity, properly so called, but must also have Parts; and those extended or not confounded with each other, which may be still in their own Nature, though not by us, unless mentally, though never so small, yet further divided: So Number may rise progressively, without any Bounds to be fixed to its Increase, which we reach after as much in vain, as at the knowledg of Infinites, whereof 'tis as impossible we should have any adequate or proper Notion, because we our selves are Finite; as that a Lesser Circle should contain a Greater.

*Quest. 15.* What's to be thought of a Wife who forsakes her Husband for his Poverty?

*Ans.* Hardly any thing bad enough, if that Poverty be not brought upon him, and still continued by his own carelessness or wickedness?

*Quest. 16.* Whether it's true, that nothing's in the Intellect, but what was first in the Senses?

*Ans.* We think not, because the Intellect must have some notions in it to judge the truth of what it receives from the Senses, prior to any such reception; nay, does oftentimes check and contradict, or examine what it receives from them, comparing, affirming, and denying. This some will tell us is nothing; but tying Words together, which if you'll believe them, is as material as stringing so many Beads one upon another. But certainly these words signify things, and some of those things are not material; and besides, supposing the things should be so; yet how the Act it self of comparing, considering, revising them in such and such an order should be so, we can by no means imagine.

*Quest. 17.* What natural Influence Jacob's Rod could have on *Laban's* Cattle?

*Ans.* The same and more than a fair Picture would have on a Woman in the same case; since the Imagination of a Brute Creature should be the stronger, because not checked or guided by Reason. Though I question whether the same Trial would succeed if made now, because though *Jacob* made use of natural means, it appears from the Text that there was something supernatural in the Event. See *Gen. Chap. 31. Ver. 12.* The Angel of God spoke to *Jacob* in a Dream, saying, Lift up thy Eyes, and see all the Rams which leap upon the Cattle, are Ring-straked, &c. See more on this Subject in the Question of Childrens Marks.