

The Athenian Mercury.

Quest. 1. **VV** Hether the Notion of the Omniformity of the Divine Idea's, the Seeing all things in God, &c. be not Enthusiasm?

Ans. Whether it be or no, the School-men had great Reason both to invent and defend it, since 'tis the only tolerable way they have, to get off with their Praying to Saints, who, they say, see all things; and, among the rest, our Prayers in the Beatifick Vision, or Speculo Trinitatis, as others call it. Which Notion of theirs is both absurd, and impossible. 'Tis absurd, to send the poor Petitioner so far about; nay, according to this Fancy, he ought to change the Form of his Ora pro nobis, and rather pray to God that the Saint might pray for him, than to the Saint that he would pray to God. Next, 'tis an impossible Supposition:— God sees all things, say they; or rather, the Idea's or Images of all things are contained in him, as we see the Images of things are in a Glass. And here a great ado they make about the Ideal or Intellectual World:— But first, That there be so much as any such Idea's, really distinct from the things they represent, will hardly be granted. Again, Their Notion of them in God is incongruous and blasphemous, or else merely metaphorical:— If the Images of things are represented in him, as in our Fancies, they make him Matter, and Passive: If they intend a metaphorical Representation, we'd fain learn what they mean thereby:— Is it only that he knows all things, and reveals 'em to the Saints? But what's this to the Speculum they talk of? And this will unavoidably, as has been said, render their Prayers to Saints in vain:— Again, They must either see all things thus represented, *uno intuitu*; or else distinctly, one after the other. If the first, the Saints are made Gods, for they comprehend all things, and God does no more.— If the latter, they must be to Eternity looking over the Idea's there, till they happen to find those Prayers which were made to 'em from all parts of the World.— Add to this, the universal Opinion of the Primitive Church, which, at least, we esteem a probable one, that Paradise is a place distinct from Heaven, and that few of the Saints enjoy the Beatifick Vision till the End of the World; and we need say no more to prove the Uncertainty and Folly of this, at first sight, so glittering a Notion.

Quest. 2. Whether the Synod of Dort had Truth on their side, or not? And whether, if they had, they were not very uncharitable in excommunicating the Remonstrants?

Ans. Among several Questions of the same nature with this, sent us by the same ingenious Gentleman, this is all we think fit to meddle with; both because they are so deep and unfathomable, there being, for ought we see, unanswerable Objections on both sides; and because these Controversies, which so miserably distracted the Church in the last Age, are now happily laid asleep, and he must not be very wise, who would endeavour again to wake 'em.— If our own Opinion be ask'd; we hope we may without Offence give it: But advancing no more than what we think we are sure of, and no good Man will deny. As to Evil, we believe the depraved Nature of Man now strongly inclined; but not properly necessitated to it. As to Good, That without supernatural Assistance, we can never perform it. As to both, That Man is a Rational Agent, and God deals with him as such.— Farther than this, we care not to venture.— Now, as to the immediate Question, "Whether the Synod of Dort had Truth on its side; We are apt to believe the two Parties have'd it between them, as is common enough in such nice Controversies.— For the latter part, "Whether, supposing they had Truth, they were not very uncharitable in excommunicating the Remonstrants.— We think it may with Justice be resolved in the Affirmative,— the Point being so deep, and so nice, concerning which they differ'd;— nay, as imprudent, as uncharitable; for so it prov'd in the Event;— whereas now Liberty is granted to all, they neither make so great a Noise, nor gain such numerous Proselytes, as formerly.

Quest. 3. What's to be thought of the old Story of the Devil of Maseon?

Ans. Though the Wits will esteem us over-credulous, we shall not be afraid to own we believe that, as well as the History of Demon of Tedworth, to have really happen'd as is related: And we have as good Reason for such Belief, as any Man can have for what he has not seen with his own

Eyes; we mean, credible Witnesses,— such as were both capable and honest;— not old Women and Children only, but a grave Minister, no way credulous, in whose House and Sight those strange things were acted. We have the Testimony of Friends and Enemies, Papists and Protestants concurring to the Truth thereof, who cou'd have no Interest to conspire in a Forgery: Nay, had there been any such thing, 'twou'd have been the Interest of one to have discovered the other. We have not one or two, but numerous Witnesses; it being free for all that wou'd, to be present.— Several of the Pranks of this Spirit were plainly supernatural, and therefore it could be no Cheat: And upon the whole, we are certain no Man can, with any Modesty, deny the Fact, unless he'll at the same time affirm, that 'tis impossible to bring convincing Evidence of any thing that happens where a Man is not actually present.

Quest. 4. Whether 'tis Prudence to venture to lodge in a Room haunted by Spirits?

Ans. 'T had had been more cautiously express'd if 't had been.— In a Room reported to be haunted; for we'll grant all the Witch-Advocates, that there may be Ten, nay, for ought we know, a hundred of those Stories false, to one true;— though if that one be true, 'tis in vain to cry out, All the rest are false. To the Question, we reply, A good Man may lodge any where, for he has his constant Guards both without and within him.— For an ill Man, he need not tempt the Devil, but wou'd do best to keep out of Harms-way,— and learn Wit from the Story of the Lawyer, in the fore-mention'd Account of the Devil of Maseon.

Quest. 5. Whether our Dissenting Brethren can be thought heartily to desire an Union with the Church of England, when they daily print such Invectives against her, and her Clergy?— As, The Advice concerning Humiliation,— The Appeal to Heaven and Earth,— The Spirit of the Church-Faction,— Priest-craft Exposed,— The Modest Enquiry,— The Tribe of Levi,— Major General Ludlow's Letters,— and the Reprinting Milton's Euxonodons? And particularly, What can the Author of the two first of those Libels mean, by his accusing the King for not answering God's Intentions in setting him up, and of letting slip so fair an Opportunity for that grand Design; and blaming his Chaplains for preaching smooth Things, and sawcily reprimanding Her Majesty for her manner of Attire?

Ans. As for our Dissenting Brethrens being thought heartily to desire an Union with the Church of England,— we fear we shall not mis-represent 'em, if we answer for the most of 'em,— that they desire no such thing;— they think they are near enough already, &c. Nor is there perhaps much Love lost, a great many of 'other side being afraid lest they should come over, and willing they shou'd e'en keep where they are, or be sent a little farther: But there's One abroad, that 'tis hoped, when he comes home, will teach us all more Wit and Manners. In the mean time, God forbid we shou'd abuse one another, or charge on either Party what they are not really guilty of. The Modest Enquiry was writ by one who is,— by Religion, a Lawyer, but no Dissenter, that we ever heard of:— However, the Event shew'd that he had but too much Reason for great part of what he there advances, though we think he pushes some things beyond either Christianity, or Humanity. The Author of the Tribe of Levi does not much trouble himself about any Religion, any more than those who applaud and defend that sordid Satyr;— though he has since made a not unhandsome Atonement for it. The Presbyterians can't defend that which is call'd Ludlow's Letter, unless they'll also defend the Murder of King Charles the First, from whose Blood they have so long endeavour'd to wash their Hands. The Reprinting of Euxonodons is a Trick of the Bookseller, to get Money; for the same Reason they print the Talmud, or Alcoran. The Author of the Advice concerning Humiliation,— the Appeal to Heaven and Earth,— the Spirit of the Church-Faction, every one knows to be a firm Church-of-England-Man;— who if he uses any harsh Expressions, his Zeal and Well-meaning may mitigate, if not excuse them.

Quest. 6. Whether there were any Reason for the Clamour against a Sermon preached before Her Majesty, March the 7th, 1689. on Matth. 25. 46.

Ans.

Ans. 'Tis a tender Point:— All we'll say on't is, that if the Opinion hinted at be a Mistake, 'tis a good-natur'd one, and which the great Person who espouseth it seems to be drawn into merely by the Sweetness of his Temper:— A Fault, which those who have been most severe upon him, will have little to answer for.

Quest. 7. Where are our Souls, immediately after their Separation from our Bodies?

Ans. Where being an Adverb referring to Place, does properly connote or imply Body, which is of the Essence of Place, as coming into its Definition. Accordingly, we cannot readily conceive how a pure Spirit can be properly in a Place, or any where; at least, 'tis in another manner in a Place, than a Body is;— but what manner that is, 'tis easier to guess than know, unless we grant 'em Vehicles; which quickly solves the Difficulty. However, taking Where in a larger Sense, and conceiving our Souls in Space, if not in Place, or in Vehicle, as before hinted, we think it probable that the Souls of wicked Men are, as soon as separated from their Bodies, in the Air, under the Custody of wicked Spirits, reserv'd there in Chains of Darknes, till the Judgment of the great Day:— And that the Souls of good Men are conveyed by the Angels into Abraham's Bosom. The Question of these last still is,— What is meant by this figurative Expression,— Abraham's Bosom? We answer, with all the Primitive Church, and some very great Men of the Present, that by that Expression is meant Paradise, or a Place of Rest and Ease, (not Purgation,) wherein the Souls of most holy Men are entertain'd, till the Union of them and their Bodies at the Day of Judgment.— But this being only a speculative Point, and not of the Essence of Faith, we are not at all positive in our Judgments therein; thinking it much more worth the while to enquire what State, than what Place we shall be in when this Life is ended; which will certainly be of Joy, or Pain, according to our Works.

Quest. 8. Why could not the Magicians of Pharaoh bring to pass the Wonder of turning Dust into Lice, as well as they did the other three Wonders before?

Ans. The Rabbins have a pleasant Reason for't:— They tell you, that the Devil's Power (with which one wou'd wonder how they became so well acquainted) extends to the production of no Creature smaller than a Barly corn. But to leave that among the rest of their ridiculous Fables, we say, 'twas from no real internal difficulty in one of these things, more than another, but because God was then pleas'd, of his own good Pleasure, to stop the Power of the Devil, from proceeding any farther; that neither the Jews might be stumbled, nor the Egyptians (till they had farther persisted) entirely harden'd; from whose own Mouths this Miracle drew that plain Confession,—"This is the Finger of God:— Unless we'll add, that to mortifie the Devil, and evince God's Power and Dominion over him, he would not in this Instance suffer him to produce so inconsiderable a Creature.

Quest. 9. I ever did, and do fully believe that there is a Deity, that made, and will one Day judge the World; yet notwithstanding my Faith is firm in this Point, I am sometimes, especially when by Reason I go about to comprehend that great Mystery, vexatiously troubled with wicked Thoughts concerning the Existence of God Millions of Worlds past, if we may conceive such a Time:— My Query is,— Whether by Reason these Thoughts may be eas'd? Or what's the best way to dissipate and banish them?

Ans. The Being of God is no Mystery, but a plain Truth, discoverable even by the Light of Nature;—but this God can never be comprehended, that is, fully known, by our finite Capacities, any more than a lesser Circle can contain a greater. 'Tis a great Stratagem of the Devil, when by Reason he cannot conquer us, to throw whole Showers of ill Thoughts into the Mind; which, being a Spirit, and so subtle an one, he may, if permitted, easily do.— Among the rest, he may with most Facility impose upon us where we are at the greatest Loss, and where he finds our Guard the weakest, and our Reason the shortest. Now, being our selves finite and temporary, we can have no proper Notion of what's eternal and infinite, but still are apt to roll back farther and farther, and suppose thousands of Ages in our Conceptions, to find what this Eternal is, whereas we having our selves once had a Beginning, can for that Reason never fully know it.— And this we say 'tis no wonder the Devil makes use of, to stumble those who are weak in the Faith; nay, sometimes dares assault with the same even the best of Men. Reason, 'tis true, may silence for the present any Objection which be, or our own Infidelity can make on this Subject, by re-minding us of the Notion of God, who could have no Beginning, no Point

assigned or conceived, wherein he was not God,--- since he must then have once receiv'd his Being;--- but this, 'tis absurd and impossible that he shou'd do, either from himself, or another:— If from another, that other wou'd be God; if from himself, he must have been before he was. Thus much, as is said, Reason may do, but it avails but little:— The Enemy has a more compendious way, than pretending still to Reason with us;--- he injects numerous ill Thoughts of the same nature, so fast, so frequently, and so violently, that 'tis impossible, without Assistance, we shou'd be able to stand against him,--- "For we wrestle not against Flesh and Blood, &c. And whence is this Assistance to be had, but from Heaven,--- by that Faith, whereby alone we may be able to quench all the fiery Darts of the Devil?— and that Faith is,--- a firm Dependence, and humble Hope of Help from Jesus, who has promised, when he pleases, to tread down Satan under our Feet.

Quest. 10. Whether did the Apostles know sufficiently their Salvation, before Christ died, and rose again?

Ans. Though the Question be only proposed, we suppose by the word Sufficiently, that the Querist wou'd ask our Judgment,--- whether they knew aright the Way to Salvation, or enough of the Christian Faith to bring 'em to Heaven?— We answer, That we see no Reason to the contrary;--- for though they were not so well skill'd in the Mysteries of Faith before the Descent of the Holy Ghost as afterwards, yet they knew, at least, much more than all those holy Men of the Old Testament, who lived before our Saviour came into the World; and not only knew more, but, abating the lesser Infirmities of Humane Life, liv'd accordingly.— Now, if those Fathers knew the Way to Happiness, and obtain'd their End with much less Knowledge than the Apostles had, it follows, the Apostles were in a better, rather than a worse Condition.

Quest. 11. Whether the Devil knows inward Thoughts?— And whether it be true that he can't say,--- Verbum Caro factum?

Ans. To search Hearts, or, which is the same, to know Thoughts, is God's sole Prerogative: The Devil can but guess from outward Signs, which being equivocal, may perhaps sometimes deceive even the great Deceiver.— Whether he can pronounce the words, "Verbum Caro factum,—" "The Word was made Flesh,—" we ingenuously confess, we have not sufficient Acquaintance with him to know, but are apt to believe 'tis only an Old Wife's Story, or a sort of a Charm, since we are thus far sure, that some other Scriptures he could and did pronounce, in his Disputation with our Saviour.

Quest. 12. If Adam had vigorously resisted the Temptation of his Wife, when she gave him to eat of the Forbidden Fruit, wou'd not his Sex have continu'd in their native and unspotted Innocence, and the Race of Women only been the Apostate People of the Creation?

Ans. This being only a Question upon Supposition, can be of little Concern, that we can conceive, either to the Querist, or any other.— However, to satisfy his Importunity, we shall here give it a short Answer.— If Adam had not sinned, undoubtedly he had not fallen, one being the natural and necessary Consequence of the other, if not indeed the same thing: And if he had not fallen, neither had he been the unhappy Father of as miserable a Posterity, which as they are like him now in Sin, so must have been then in Purity and Innocence. But then, to talk of the Race of Women, as distinct from that of Man, nothing can be more absurd, or ridiculous. As for Eve, 'tis very certain, had she only sinn'd, she only had dy'd, and that perhaps immediately, it being no more difficult for Infinite Power to make another Consort for Adam, than it was to make the first.

Quest. 13. Did not Eve lose great part of her Beauty, with her Innocence?

Ans. We think it more than probable she did, for these Reasons:— By Sin she became obnoxious to all the Diseases which her Sex hardly know how either to bear or number,--- to all the Fatigues of Life, the Inclemencies of the Weather,--- her own Passions, and perhaps Adam's too. She must needs be exquisitely tormented with the Sense of what she had lost, and being besides, the fatal Cause of Adam's losing it. In Sorrow she was to conceive, and bring forth,--- a greater Plague than all the rest.— Now any of these Causes, especially all together, with the Change of her Air and Diet, after the Loss of Paradise, must needs make a great Alteration, not only in her Complexion and Air, but even in the whole Frame of her Body, and render her much more a Woman, and less an Angel, than at her first Creation.