

The Athenian Mercury :

Saturday, August 15. 1691.

Quest. 1. **VV**hen two Armies are engaged, whether God Almighty always fights for one, or if he does not often leave it to Chance, or the strength of Arms? If otherwise, how Lewis the Tyrant could be so great a Conqueror?

Ans. Boccacino indeed tells a Story that two Armies, being on a Time ready to engage, both on all accounts equally match'd, in Sun, Ground, Wind, Number, Discipline, Courage, Officers and Generals, and both sides praying devoutly for Success, it was thereupon ordered above, that two Armies should never hereafter meet upon such equal Terms, but that the side which had an advantage in Number, Courage, Conduct, &c. should henceforward always have the Victory. The Fable was proper enough for an Italian, and the Moral very pleasing to a Nation that's almost all Atheists. But we have learnt better, That the Race is not to the Swift, nor the Battel to the Strong. Whence it's plain, that strength of Arms does not carry it, many unforeseen accidents in a moments Time altering the whole Face of a Battel, and snatching it out of their Hands, who think they are secure of it; and this either by a motion made on the mind of a General, or insatiating him and his Thoughts, or a Pannick Fear unaccountably seizing on the Soldiers on one side, or an extraordinary Valour given on the other. Or else by outward Causes, a Storm suddenly rising, Thunder, Lightning, the Sun, the Wind, all which have in many Instances entirely alter'd a Battel, from what at first it appear'd. Nor is this to be refer'd to Chance, or I know not what blind Cause, (which is nothing at all,) but owing to God's Providence, and wise Disposal of all Humane Events. The Jews were a Glass to the whole World, when Pious, their Arms were successful against never so great odds, when the contrary, they had still the worst—Things are not so clear now it's own'd, why God casts the Victory one way or t'other, but that he does so is still clear, and that his Providence which interposes in the Life of a Sparrow, does much more in that of a Man, yet more still of such vast Numbers, and most of all the Fates of Kingdoms and Empires. For the Objection brought, if the strength of Arms did not carry all, how comes Lewis the Tyrant to be so great a Conqueror? We might easily answer, Not by the strength of Arms, it being notorious enough, that he never fairly won a Victory, tho' he has basely bought many. But to come yet closer, let the Objection at least be so modest to stay till he sees his End, persons of his Character having oftentimes been suffered to rise so high, only in order to a greater Fall. After all, if that does not answer Expectation, and God's Providence should not seem sufficiently vindicated in this, and some other Instances in this World, let him but stay till the other, and there we dare promise him entire satisfaction.

Quest. 2. Whether there are any other Worlds besides this we live in?

Ans. The word *World* is in this place an equivocal or ambiguous Term, which we must therefore distinguish upon before we answer the Question. If by *World* is meant such an Earth, so inhabited with such Creatures as ours is, no doubt there's no other visible World, because there is no other place where Mankind, or the Race of Adam lives. That there are other Globes besides this Earth, we are as sure of as our Eyes can make us, and can never doubt as long as we see the Sun, Moon, and Stars all round us. That any of these are actually inhabited, as the certainty can never be known, so we esteem the probability to be very weak, if it lies not rather on the other side of the Question. Spirits have no need of such habitations; besides, the Good are in Heaven, the Bad in all probability nearer this World, where they may do most mischief. No other rational Creatures there are but Man, and for irrational, they are only for his Service, and what should they do so far out of his reach? It's true, God may make some other

orders of Beings, to us unknown, but still according to our notions of Things, they must some way or other partake of these Natures before mentioned—tho' whatever they are, if any such thing, they are to us utterly unknown.

Quest. 3. Why Religious Converse, as recommended by Dr. Goodman in his Winter Evenings Conference, is not more practis'd?

Ans. Because the World is neither *Virtuous* nor *Ingenious* enough to write after so fair a Copy—Tho' we'd be as charitable as possible, and hope one Reason of this neglect may be because not many persons have seen that Book; for we think it almost impossible to read those fine things he there advances, without some Inclinations to put 'em in practice.

Quest. 4. How comes the Duty of Singing Psalms in private Families to be so generally neglected as we find it is?

Ans. There are a sort of *Enthusiasts* who neglect this *Christian Exercise* out of a mistaken piece of Conscience, thinking it, forsooth, a carnal way of Worship, tho' therein they directly contradict the Apostles Precept, and our Saviour's practice, and may as well object against using Words as Tunes in Devotion, one being invented as well as the other; nay, perhaps a Tune the more natural of the two: But of these there are not many. A more general Reason for the neglect may be the general Decay of Piety, every where too visibly reigning—Singing Praises and Psalms to God being too Spiritual an Exercise for the most of Men, as too Carnal for some few. We are unwilling among other Reasons, to remember that we have seen those times when 't had been enough to have been call'd a *Phanatick*, to have had any such thing in a Family: but these things are better forgotten. There's one Reason more which we are confident has extremely prejudic'd the Ingenious part of the World against this most pleasant and holy Exercise, and that is the disadvantage of the *Vulgar Translation* (not to add the ill choice of the Tunes.) But this inconvenience is already partly remedied by the incomparable Versions of Mr. Patrick, (as far as he has gone) Mr. Ford, and some others. And 'tis not doubted will be totally taken off by a more general and correct Version, when ever a happy Peace shall give opportunity both for that and other regulations of greater moment.

Quest. 5. Whether Papists ought not to be banished the Nation?

Ans. The Law is a little more proper Judge than either the *Querist*, or the *Athenian Mercury*. The Wisdom of the Nation has not thought fit to banish 'em, and he must be a bold Man who will pretend to lay down better measures. But to come to the Reason of the thing, tho' they are *Papists*, they are *Englishmen*, and as such have a right to their Country and Estates as well as others, while they don't render themselves obnoxious to the Government, without which their Banishment would be as unjust as impolitick; and impolitick 'twould be with a witness, to do such a thing as must unavoidably exasperate all *Papish Princes*, who would think they had just Reason for retaliation, and banishing all the Protestants as we the *Papists*, besides the Breach of the Confederacy, which would hereby be immediately ruin'd. But what are all these prudential Considerations, say some men, to set by the Obligation of an indispensable Duty? They are *Idolaters*, and as such not to be suffer'd in the Land, whatever Inconveniences may attend their removal. Besides, they are always plotting, their Religion won't let them let us alone, and we can't be safe till we are fairly rid of 'em.—In answer, tho' we would not be thought Advocates for Popery, but Truth and Reason; as for their being *Idolaters*, tho' by their worshipping God by Images, we really think with all Protestants, they are guilty of what may not improperly be term'd by that Name, yet all know there are several sorts of Idolatry, of which, though bad enough, this is not the

the most hainous. Besides, we know no Warrant for removing Idolaters, tho' we do Idols out of a Land: For if they stay here, they may by God's Grace be converted, if we send 'em away into Popish Countries, they and their Children must inevitably continue in that dark Religion, till the downfall of Babylon. Tho' still there's a great difference between our sending 'em all out of our Country, and suffering the publick Exercise of their Idolatrous worship, and their seducing others to it here, and between our denying 'em the Liberty of their Religion, and forcing 'em to embrace ours. As for their Principles directly leading 'em to Rebellion, and hence our not being safe without their remove, we are to remember that their Councils never oblige 'em to extirpate Heresie, but when they are able. They have smarted sufficiently already, and shou'd be wiser now, and sensible of the ease they enjoy under the present Government, more than e're they had before since the Reformation, as well as grateful for the Deliverance they receiv'd by their present Majesties as well as we, they being in as much danger of the little Mob as we of the great, who began with 'em as if they were in earnest, and had not the Government strenuously interposed, and settled all things, had in a few weeks rooted up the very Foundations of them and their House throughout all the Kingdom.

Quest. 6. Some time before the Death of King Charles the First, there was a very strange Appearance in the Air seen here in England, viz. The Effigies of two Armies in Array one against the other, the General of one of 'em being Headless for some time, when suddenly there was a Head united to the Body, and thereupon both Armies immediately vanished—Your Thoughts are desired upon the whole, and what are we to think of such strange Phenomena?

Ans. We have read many such strange Stories as this in Books of Prodigies, but with most of 'em better attested than we find 'em. We wou'd fain know of the Gentleman who proposes the Question, what good Author there is relates it? whether he has it only from some of the Diurnals or Mercuries then printed, or whether he affirms it of his own knowledge? But supposing it true, the Event of things has long since sufficiently superseded any Interpretation of ours. Upon the whole granting that, and several other things of the same Nature to have really happen'd, as we believe sometimes they may have done, it can be referr'd to nothing else but the kind warnings of some invisible Monitors, those perhaps who preside over the Fates of particular Kingdoms and Nations, (if any such there be) in order by such strange Tokens to perswade men to Repentance, that those Judgments may be averted which are juft hanging over their Heads. Or we might add, supposing this present Relation of our Quereft true, it nearly represented what follow'd, as to that unhappy Prince's Decollation, his Sons Succession, and immediate Peace upon't. What those Phenomena's were, we dare not offer to decide, since we can understand nothing, but either by our Senses which convey the Ratio or Quiddity of Objects to our Understanding, or else by immediate Inspirations. The last is not expected of us, and the first is impossible, because the Eye (which in this Instance was all the Medium of Conveyance) was too far off; tho' perhaps if it had been nearer, the Apparition might have been Air, or Clouds condens'd into such Representations, by Commission'd Monitors, Angels, or Spirits: But we only offer this as a Conjecture, and leave every body at their liberty.

Quest. 7. Why Sea-water is Salt, and yet Spring-water which comes from it is sweet?

Ans. The first part of the Question has already been answer'd. It proceeds as but few now doubt, from that vast Quantity, and those huge Rocks of Salt, which are in many places at the bottom of the Sea, or the bordering Shores and Mountains. For the latter part, How Spring-water which comes from this Salt is Sweet? 'Tis by percolation, or a sort of straining, which it undergoes in its passage thro' the Earth, which gave occasion to set on foot that profitable Invention of changing Salt-water into Fresh immediately, when there shou'd be occasion for't, as in long Voyages, contrary Winds, &c. at Sea. This is prov'd almost to demonstration, by an Experiment commonly made by the Sea-fige. Dig a hole one the Sea-shore near the Water, and if the Ground be sandy, or close, the water you find there shall be

sweet and potable; but if rocky or more open, the water shall come up brackish, or perfectly Salt, the passage not being strait or fine enough to drain away its Salt from it.

Quest. 8. Whether a Contract solemnly made with all the most Sacred Invocations, may be violated by any unfortunate Accident or Error in Life or Manners? (the breach of the Seventh Commandment only excepted) and whether the offended Party may abandon the other for a new Lover, without a joynt Consent, or whether it may be done with consent?

Ans. Such a Marriage is Valid, and not to be cancell'd either with or without the Consent of either of both Parties, unless under peril of Damnation, which continued Habit of Adultery exposes the Vow-breaker to upon another Marriage, which will certainly one time or other be met, altho' our Common Law takes no notice of it, for Marriage is like a Deed of Gift, there's no recalling it when once done: So that young Persons (for it's too common a Vice of the Age) shou'd be careful to act no farther than they are willing to stand by. That Marriage is not generally what it is taken to be, is manifest by the several Customs of Nations, these publick Solemnizations are only to the satisfaction of the World, to avoid Scandal, and make proper Objects for the Law to work on, in matter of Issue, Debts, Mortgages, and to give other Persons notice from intruding into such a Right or Propriety; all which wou'd be confus'd, if there was no Person that cou'd legally be indited: as for example, a Whores debt is her own, but a Wives her Husbands. We cou'd give many dreadful Instances of Vow-breakers, but of late a very particular one. A young Man courted a Maid, won her, and they were contracted solemnly to twixt themselves, but not marrying immediately, he solicited her for a Nights lodging, as there was convenience enough, (too much as it hapned,) she obstinately refused, before a publick Satisfaction was given to the World. He promised to marry her the next day, made many solemn Protestations of his Constancy, and at length prevail'd; they slept together that Night, something hindred their Marriage the next day, and with less, tho' not without some Importunity, he slept with her again, and amongst other Protestations, he wish'd if he prov'd false to her, and pray'd to God he might break his Neck. In a little time she prov'd with Child, inform'd him of it, and pray'd him to marry her. He began to scorn her, and went and courted another Mistress, and the next day after, in chopping a Tree he fell down and broke his Neck. And thus the Vow breaker met his wish'd for Fate: And well if all his punishment was cancell'd by such a Judgment.

We have receiv'd several Questions, and very remarkable Occurrences relating to the present Reformation on foot, (and expect to receive several more on the same Subject,) which shall all be printed together in one Paper.

If Mr. Jonas Ellis sends us the Discovery he mentions in the Letter he sent to us this Week, he shall according to his desire, have our Thoughts upon it—We have receiv'd many Questions this Week, which are answer'd in those Mercuries we have already publish'd.

The Questions receiv'd concerning the Education of Youth, the Methods of reading English History, &c. will be answer'd in a little time.

Advertisement.

Next Monday being the 17th. of this Instant August will be finish'd all the 12 Numbers that complete our Second Volume, which shall then be published all together, with an Index to it, and a Preface containing those standing Rules we have lately promised our Querists; which said Preface, Index, and 12 Numbers shall be but 12 d. price, that so all those Gentlemen that took in the single Sheets from time to time, may have their Second Volume entire for 2 s. 6 d. And also those Coffee-houses that did the like, may then have the Second Volume stich'd up by them, for the constant entertainment of their Customers, single Sheets being apt to be lost, except pasted in a Book.