

The Athenian Mercury:

Saturday, August 22. 1691.

Quest. 1. **VV** *What's the Reason that it generally Thunders more Terrible at Night than at Day?*

Ans. If the Query had been, *What's the Reason that Thunder seems more Terrible, &c.* the Supposition would have been less questionable, and the cause thereof easily accounted for. In the dead of Night, tho' 'tis for none but Heroes to have a horrid silence invade their Ears, 'tis common enough for other People to have horrid noises do so, which are rendred more distinct, and consequently more terrible, by the universal stillness every where else. Thus it may be with Thunder when it happens in the Night, which being accompany'd with Lightning, and the Element otherwise very dark by the Thunder Clouds, must still strike a greater Horror into all sensible Creatures than it would at Day time, when Discourse, the Light, and various Objects take off the mind from ruminating so deeply, and attending so distinctly on what fills it with so much concern.

But besides this accidental Reason, we know not but there may be a natural one given, since upon the Observations we have made upon great Thunders, they have in our Judgment been really, and in themselves for the most part more loud and terrible by Night than by Day, the reason whereof we conceive to be this, — That by Day the attractive Virtue of the Sun generally draws the Thunder Clouds higher than by Night, when being freed from any such attraction, they fall down nearer the Earth, where discharging themselves of their load, they must by as necessary a consequence make a proportionably greater noise, as the discharge of Cannon does in the same Circumstances, which if you are near the place where they are Fired, make you Deaf with the insupportable sound, but if at some distance, it dyes away like imperfect Thunder.

Quest. 2. *Gentlemen, let me trouble your Society to give me your Thoughts upon the force of Thunder, Lightning, Earthquakes, and Eclipses?*

Ans. Lightning and Thunder may go together, since they are the Effects of one Cause, viz. Your *Unctuous Bituminous* sort of Vapours are exhal'd as other Vapours are, and mounting as high as the middle Region of the Air, they are encompass'd on all sides by the extreme coldness of that Air which encloses them, and in order to their Conservation, reunite and take fire by an Antiperistasis, where striving to get out by their Motion in the Air, they make that *Rumbling Noise* we call Thunder. But because every Person don't understand what we mean by an Antiperistasis, we shall tell 'em that Nature does not only produce Beings, but fortifies 'em against the Assault of their contraries, both in vegetative and Animal Beings, and also in inanimate Bodies, which stand upon the defensive when they are set upon by External Agents, whose contrary qualities coming to engage against 'em, they redouble their Forces, and rally all together as it were into a Body the better to receive their Charge. And this is that which Philosophers call Antiperistasis, and every Body may see its effects, when Water and Fire are put together, or Lyme and Water, or other unfriendly Opposites. Thus as we said before, these sort of Exhalations being of a hot and dry Nature when they are enclos'd by an extraordinary cold, strive to defend themselves, but being too weak are cast down with such a Violence: But since the Nature of their Force and Violence is requir'd in the Question, we shall give a very late true Instance of an Accident in Northampton-shire: sixteen persons in a Storm retir'd under a great Ash-tree, where having set down, one of 'em took a little Dog upon his Lap, and held him by both the Ears, another took a Snush-Box out of his Pocket, and laid some Snush upon his hand in order to take it, when immediately a Terrible Clap of Thunder, with a Thunder-bolt, fell into the midst of the Ash-tree under which they sat, clove it into four

pieces, killed four of 'em dead, and wounded ten more, that 'tis fear'd they'll not recover, and two only escap'd (and which is wonderful) in the middle of the rest; the Person that was taking Snush held his hand to his Nose without letting it fall after he was dead, sitting just in the same posture as when alive; the other person with the little Dog, held the Dog in the same posture as if he had been alive, the Dog also was Dead. I have read of a Parallel instance in a Church, where about thirty six (as I take it) were kill'd with such another Clap of Thunder, and every Person that was dead sat as if he had been alive. That they were killed is no wonder, but that they were kill'd to be so soon stiff, as not to fall an Arm, or bow their Heads, is very amazing; but to avoid being ask'd the reason in another Paper, we'll give our Thoughts upon it here. That the Spirits of Sulphur are incredibly strong, we need no other Instances than the Effects of Gunpowder, and that they are a chief ingredient in the matter of Thunder, is evident by the intollerable smell of Sulphur where the Thunderbolt falls, and that the swiftness of a thing moving, differs from the Nature of leisurely Motions; we shall also give you one Instance which we know to be matter of Fact. Take an Apple, set it upon a Post, discharge a Piece with small shot at it, and tho' it be shot thro' with five or six pellets (as has been try'd) yet the Apple is not mov'd it self. Now these dead persons having nothing to be seen upon 'em, and yet kill'd, it must be by the subtle fire, (coming along with the Bolt,) whose motion being so violent and swift, it had not time to move the Bodies; and being so very fine it penetrated 'em without tearing or mangling 'em into pieces, which Fire also must be the occasion of the immediate stiffning of their dead Bodies, for Nature was so violently shock'd by that unusual force, that its frame and manner of acting was altogether inverted, and the Natural heat so chang'd and overcome by that unnatural Fire, that the usual office of cooling by degrees into a stiffness was extirpated and supplanted by a new method of acting, produc'd by the *Spiritus Sulphureus* Fire that took possession of the Bodies.

As to the Nature of Earthquakes, we have said something of it elsewhere, see Vol. 1. Numb. 10. Q. 5.

Eclipses, as they are two, so they have two different Causes: We'll begin with that of the Sun, which is thus effected: the Sun is in a higher Orb or Sphere, more distant from the Earth than the Moon, which is also of a more Opaque and Dark Body than the Sun; therefore whenever the Moon intercepts or comes betwixt us and the Sun in a right Line, so much of the Sun's Body as is intercepted by the Moon, is Eclips'd. — As to the Eclipse of the Moon, 'tis thus, The Moon receives its Light by reflection, or borrowing from the Sun; now whenever the Globe of the Earth happens to intercept betwixt the Moon and Sun all in a right Line, so much of the Moon as the Earth hides from the Sun, so much (I say) of the Moon is Eclips'd. Thus much for a plain short Description of Eclipses.

Quest. 3. *Your Opinion is requested, Whether there be such a thing as a Thunderbolt? What it is, as to its Substance, Nature and Form; and whether the Effects of these Stormy Nights be particularly from Lightning, or from Thunderbolts, as to the sad Accidents which do happen?*

Ans. See Vol. 1. Numb. 8. Q. 7.

Quest. 4. *Whether its lawful to make a Vow never to Marry? if 'tis so, Why not to all as well as one? and if such Vow be lawfully made, whether 'or no it ought to be broken?*

Ans. We question very much, whether it be lawful to make an absolute Vow never to Marry, and are rather inclin'd to conclude in the Negative, for this to us unanswerable Reason — Because the whole Temper and Constitution of the Body has been known to alter in some Years time; and though a Person may at one time have Power

er over himself in things of that Nature, he may not at another; the Body being perfectly mechanical; and in some cases refusing to obey the Mind. A safer Course in our Judgment, if Persons are willing to devote themselves to a single Life, for the more uninterrupted Service of God and their Countrey, is to do as 'tis said a late Noted Man has done for several Years, *Make a Vow every Morning, not to Marry 'till Night*; since for so long one may be able to guess at ones own strength. — For the next Question — If such a Vow be lawful to One, why not to All? We have already Answer'd, That such an absolute Vow never to Marry, wou'd not be lawful to any one, (we wou'd be understood, in such Cases where there's a possibility of breaking it) and if not to One, much less to All. We add yet more, that though to One, not to All; for this wou'd in the time of two or three Generations unpeople all the World. The latter part of the Question is from what has been already said easily decided. A Vow lawfully made, ought not to be broken, unless there appears some impossibility of its performance, which cou'd not be foreseen at the time when 'twas made — But a Vow unlawfully made, that is, either to an unlawful thing, or to what we might then foresee an impossibility in its performance, must be repented of, that ever 'twas so wickedly or rashly made; when in one Case it proves impossible to be kept, and in then other ought to be broken.

Quest. 5. *Whether all Souls will be equally happy in Heaven?*

Ans. We think not, being rather inclin'd to believe Degrees of Glory there, as of Piety here — If Degrees of Punishment in Hell, there must be of Happiness in Heaven: One there is, or else all Sins were equal; the other consequently there must be; for there is a right unto, and Justice in Rewards as well as Punishments, though one, 'tis granted, owing to God's goodness; t'other to our own desert — Over and above, that without granting such Degrees, we know not how to make sense of Paul's words — *As one Star differs from another Star in Glory, so also shall it be in the Resurrection of the Just.*

Quest. 6. *Whether the Soul of a Child quick in the Womb shall enjoy Heaven or Hell?*

Ans. Enjoying Hell, is a very odd Expression, — But the meaning's plain, — Whether it shall be eternally Happy or Miserable? In Answer — It must be one of 'em — it cannot be without Action, because that's of the Essence of Spirit; and if it acts, it must be sensible either of Joy or Misery. But we suppose the Question was intended disjunctively, — In which of those two States we ought to conclude the Souls of Infants? We have had some Occasion to give our Thoughts formerly on a Question very near a-kin to this, wherein if we expressed our selves less cautiously than the Subject required, or any Person will take the Pains to convince us of any Error in the Judgment given thereon, we are very ready to alter both our Thoughts and Words; 'till when we must take leave to continue much in the same mind, and shall give this Answer to the Question now before us — That for the Children of good Men or Believing Parents, there's none of the most rigid but think 'em Happy, and sav'd by their Parents Faith; though rather we'd say, by the Merits of our Saviour. That if any will say, the Child shall be eternally punish'd with Eternal Misery for the Parents Sin, or want of Faith; and that the immediate Parent, as well as Adam; that the most just and merciful God will put a pure Soul into corrupted Matter, let it remain there but a few Minutes perhaps, or Hours, without ever being so much as capable of offending him; on purpose only to take it out agen, and throw it into infinite endless Torments; or that the Merits of our Saviour cannot or must not reach the poor Infant, because of want of Faith in his immediate Parents — If any are of this mind, they must forgive us, if we can never subscribe to such Doctrines, as in our Opinions, necessitate Mankind to entertain very hard Thoughts of the common Father of the Universe.

Quest. 6. *Whether 'tis lawful for Christians to Swear on any Occasion?*

Ans. Yes, undoubtedly — if on great and solemn Occasions, for they have the Examples — of God himself, who is commonly introduced in the Scriptures, swearing by himself — and strengthening the Faith of his

Saints, by his Oath as well as his Promise: And of good Men, who have follow'd this Example, St. Paul himself calling God to witness; when he tells those whom he writes to — *Before God I lye not.* 'Tis the end of all Strife, and the way of Decision not only permitted but enjoyned by God himself, and that not as a part of the Ceremonial Law. 'Tis Objected, That our Saviour Commands his Disciples — *Swear not at all!* To which we Answer, that this Precept must be restrain'd to common Swearing, upon light and frivolous Occasions, which it seems 'twas the Custom of the Jews to do, (as 'tis now with so many who disgrace the Name of Christians) the Unlawfulness whereof our Saviour teaches, even notwithstanding all their subterfuges, and a sort of Clipping their Oaths (as some now) not Swearing immediately and directly by God, but by Heaven, Jerusalem, the Temple, or the Altar; which our Saviour tells 'em, is the same as if they swore by God himself. But that this Precept is not to be taken in the utmost literal latitude, wherein some few Enthusiasts receive it, is plain by examining those other Precepts given at the same time. That of parting with the Coat, of turning the other Cheek, &c. which as all acknowledge, only signifie a disposition rather to suffer injuries than to ferr 'em, or privately revenge 'em. 'Tis also plain by the foremention'd Example of St. Paul, who undoubtedly understood the Mind of our Saviour in those Precepts he left his Church: Unless those who are against Oaths will be so modest here as they have been in other places, and plainly tell St. Paul, that he wanted the Spirit, when he made use of any such Expression.

Quest. 7. *Whether the Enlargement of the Fair to fourteen Days be not an Encroachment upon the King's Prerogative, and that; and the Erecting of Booths for unlawful Sports and Plays, and the Disorders usually committed there, be not a forfeiture of the Fair?*

Quest. 8. *Whether if the Fair be really forfeited, it were not much better, and of greater benefit even to the City it self, that it be wholly suppress'd than continued?*

Quest. 9. *Whether the erecting of Booths for such purposes at the time of a Solemn Publick Fast, be not inconsistent with such a Reformation as ought indispensably to accompany a Publick Humiliation; and whether the Toleration of such an Abuse under such a Circumstance, be not more like to provoke some Judgment, than the Humiliation to obtain any Blessing?*

Ans. These three Questions come from the same hand that Writ those Nine mentioned in our last Mercury; to all which we now Reply, That we are well assured that there will be such Measures speedily taken by those in Authority, as will render any Answer of ours needless.

Quest. 10. *What's the Cause of Fly-blows, as they are commonly called?*

Ans. Tho' they are call'd so by the Vulgar, who think the Flies spit or blow 'em out of their mouths, 'tis notorious, that they are mistaken in the End from whence they come; they being no better nor worse than perfect Eggs, by which all Insects (and perhaps all other living Creatures) are propagated. Which Eggs in a little time turn to Maggots; as those Maggots to Flies agen of the same Species with those whence they are first produc'd.

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