

The Athenian Mercury:

Saturday, September 26. 1691.

Quest. 1.

VV

Hether Virtue and Goodness, or Prudence, be any defence against Misery and Misfortune? Or whether Virtuous and Good Men be'n't equally liable to misery and distress, as the worst of men? What's the meaning of that Common Proverb, God never sends Mouths, but he sends Meat? And how does he provide for Men in misery and distress? How does he Feed the Hungry, Cloath the Naked, and take Care of Virtuous and Good Men?

Ans. Those who propose these Questions, seem to be very much in Earnest, and to write out of the abundance of their own Grief and Misery, and therefore at the same time that we blame 'em, we must pity 'em too, since the very best of Men have fallen into the same mistake, when they have seen good Men miserable.

We Answer then to their Questions, — That Virtue and Goodness, generally speaking, are a Defence, though Prudence also must be used. That God does take Care of the Good, and defend and provide for them, otherwise there could be no Providence, and then no God. That Virtuous Men are for these Reasons less liable to Misfortunes than the Wicked: Nay, that God by his Common Providence makes Provision for all his Creatures. If Fast be brought against this, we have this to say upon it; That often times those are not good Men, but Hypocrites, who are miserable: That if really good, they may yet in some things be faulty, and for that be for a time Punished to make 'em better: That if they neglect prudent means to obtain or preserve a share in the Necessities of Life, or imprudently and unnecessarily draw a greater Charge on themselves than they can maintain, they must blame themselves, not Providence: That in some Instances of Common Calamities, the Good can no more expect to be always preserv'd, than from Sickness, Pain, or the other Natural Inconveniencies of Life: That notwithstanding all this, a fervent Devotion and generous Trust on God's Mercies, Promises and Providences, are not in vain — That they often deliver out of misery and distress, and none knows that they shall not while there is Life, for so long there's Hope; and when once the happy Turn comes, the former uneasy Circumstances render the present much more pleasing and welcom: That if all fails — there is another World — which if those who are afflicted in this don't believe, nay, are not willing to stay for, they are not patient, they are not good, they have no share in this particular Providence of God, they themselves Vindicate his Justice, and Destroy their own Argument.

Quest. 2. *How you'll prove to an Atheist, That the Scriptures are the Word of God; and to a Jew, that the Messiah is come?*

Ans. The first of these Questions involves an absurd Supposition, when it talks of proving any thing to be the Word of God to one who owns no God at all: Unless for want of close thinking, the Querist mistakes every Antiscripturist for an Atheist; though the Truth is, among those who pretend to be Christians, there's little difference between 'em. But to one who believes a God, we have formerly proved the Scriptures to be his Word; nay, must be so, even according to the Notion of the Deist, who must believe the Word of Reason to be the Word of God; and 'tis easie to prove, That all the Holy Scriptures, and what ever is contained therein, to be highly Consonant to Reason. — But we have gone further, and prov'd those immediately and divinely inspir'd, who were the Writers of 'em. To a Jew, we prove Jesus to be the Messiah, by the Completion of all the Prophecies of the Old Testament, especially that of the Seventy Weeks, and the Scepters not departing from Judah — by the Wonders he wrought, greater than those perform'd by Moses, for the Confirmation of the Truth, and good of Mankind: Which besides, it had not been agreeable to God's Providence, to have suffer'd, had he been an Impostor. By the Confession of

the Devils themselves of one side, and by repeated Visions and Voices from Heaven of the other: Lastly, by the Tendency of our Saviour's Doctrine, by the Event of his Prophecies, both upon himself and Jerusalem, and concerning the increase of Christianity over the whole Earth — the Progress whereof, without Force, Art or Learning, against all of 'em, and all the World; nay, the Carnal Inclinations of all Mankind is besides a strong and invincible Argument for the Truth thereof. Besides, the Jews themselves cannot deny but that some of their own Rabbies grant the Messiah was to be a suffering Prince, and their own Josephus tells us, that about that time a great Prince was expected to appear in the Eastern Parts of the World, the Belief of which, as he adds, was the Cause of so many Revolts at that time among the Jews. And this is also Confirm'd by the Question of the Pharisees to John, and of John and the Woman of Samaria to our Saviour. One Argument more we have, and that's the Dispersion of the Jews unto this Day, according to the Prophecies of him and his Apostles concerning 'em.

Quest. 3. *Whether it would not be highly beneficial to Piety, if the London Divines would meet, and take each of 'em a particular Vice, in the same manner as they agreed upon Controverted Points in the two last Reigns, and each handle his Point with all the Charms of Sacred Eloquence and Holy Zeal imaginable, since the common, lifeless and insipid Discourses on those Subjects never make any deep or lasting Impressions on the minds of the Readers?*

Ans. They have already done what may be almost equivalent to this Proposal, in Obedience to Authority, all their Pulpits having been employ'd as the Querist would have the Presses; and if those Discourses which have been there made, were but that way render'd more publick, they might go very far in helping forward that great Reformation of Manners, which the State is so earnest to accomplish, and all good Men so much desire.

Quest. 4. *Whether the Socinian Heresie were broach'd in St. John's Time, and occasion'd the writing his Gospel?*

Ans. We are told, in his Time, in the Scriptures themselves, of such as denied the Lord that bought them. Church Historians give us an Account of Cerinthus, Ebion, the Gnosticks, &c. who denied the Divinity and Eternity of our Saviour, one whereof implies the other; and that on the Increase of those Hereticks, St. John being then the only surviving Apostle, at the Desire of the Bishops and Churches of Asia, did ex profess, write this Holy Gospel. Let's now examin into the Gospel it self, and see whether it answers that End; which at first glance shews us, that 'tis impossible for Man to invent fuller or clearer Expressions for the Proof of any thing in question, than this Evangelist has for our Saviour's Divinity, as well as his Existence before he came into the World. His Existence before his Birth is prov'd from the Baptist's Confession; 1 Joh. 15. *He was before me* — and that in Order of Time, because oppos'd to coming after him. That he was in Isaiah's Time, John 12. 41. That he was before Abraham, and that as the very I AM, the incommunicable Name of God, John 8. 58. Lastly, *That he was before all Worlds* — In the beginning he was with God, Joh. 1. 1. and that he made the World, V. 3. *All Things were made by him.* v. 10. *The World was made by him,* and this not the New Creation, because, *ibid.* the World knew him not. Further, he is expressly stiled God by the Evangelist, v. 1. *The Word was God, not Is,* as the Socinians, but *was,* and that not after his Resurrection, but in the Beginning. And when I can see all this Answer'd by the subtlest Wits in the World, without straining it into perfect incongruous Nonsense, I promise to turn Socinian.

Quest. 5. *Whether the Foundations of the Earth are to continue for ever?*

Ans. The Querist has propos'd the Doubt in such a manner, as if he intended a secret Dilemma in't. That the

the Foundations of the Earth shall continue for ever, is Scripture; but then how can the World have any End? But this Argument is so far from binding on both sides, that it rather admits of a double Solution. It's not at all improbable that the Foundations of the Earth, the Substance or Matter thereof, may really continue for ever, in the utmost extent of the Word, as it certainly must, unless annihilated by a particular Act of God. — And how extremely does this seem to be favour'd by that Expression both of Heaven and Earth — *They shall be changed*; which supposes they have still a Being, though not such an one as formerly; but as they are call'd, and as the alteration of their Qualities will make 'em, a *New Heaven and New Earth*. For the other side, which is the more common Interpretation, viz. That the Earth as 'tis now, shall be Consumed, it may so very well be, notwithstanding this place, since the Word *for ever*, in that place, as 'tis notorious to any one who can but read his Hebrew Psalter, signifies very often any long space of time, or at least is used in a Poetical, Hyperbolical Sense — as the Ancient Salutations of the Eastern Countries — *Let the King live for ever*; and David himself (if that Place looks not beyond Solomon) when he Prays or Prophecies of his Throne's being as the Days of Heaven.

Quest. 6. *How was't possible that the Dew of Hermon should descend upon the Mountains of Sion, when those Places are at least an Hundred Miles distant from each other?*

Ans. This Question, among others, so puzzled St. Austin, that the good Father, as was usual in those Cases, *Allegorizes away all the Difficulty*, and finds out a mystical Meaning, when he knew not what to make of the literal. Nor have most of the Attempts since made been more successful to remove one of these Mountains and set it a little nearer the other. Some say 'tis the same specifical, though not individual Dew, at which rate we might say, The Dew of Tenariff descends upon Highgate-Hill, but how *Naturally* let any judge. Our last Translation I confess does the Business, though a little too effectually, adding some Words to clear the Sense, which are not in the Original. Our Opinion in this Case, with all due respect and deference for greater Men of a different Judgment, is, That by the *Mountains of Sion* here, are meant the *Mountains of Gilead*, which were part of the Kingdom of *Sihon*, King of the *Amorites*, and which are just under *Hermon*, and that the Word *Sion* here crept in by the mistake of the Transcriber instead of *Sihon*, their Sound being the same, or very near, though there are some Letters differing in the Writing. Our Reasons for this Interpretation are,

1. The *Impossibility* (as it appears to us) of giving any other tolerable Solution of the Place, all those already brought being so unsatisfactory.

2. The *Oppositeness* of the Metaphor, and the Agreement it has with that just before produc'd. The Psalmist there compares Unity, first, To the *Holy Ointment which from Aarons Head ran down to his Beard*, and thence to the *Skirts of his Garment*: Just after, to the *Dew of Hermon*, which descends on the *Mountains of Sihon or Gilead*, lying near it, and which makes the Metaphor much more lively.

3. Because we find this *Hermon* call'd *Mount Sion*, or as the 70, the *Mount of Sihon*. Deut. 4. 48. — *even unto Mount Sion which is Hermon*. As in a great Ledge of Hills, all these being only a part of *Mount Libanus* verging more Southerly, the general and particular Names are commonly confounded. 'Tis acknowledg'd this Interpretation is also liable to Objections, but I think not to as many as the other.

Quest. 7. *How Judas was Hang'd, and yet burst asunder? How the High-Priests bought the Field, and yet purchas'd it, as we read in the Acts and Evangelists?*

Ans. The common Answer is, He first Hang'd himself, and the Rope breaking fell to the Ground, his Bowels gushing out by a stroke, either on a stump of a Tree, or some great Stone. Nor is there any absurdity in this Opinion — though there's a second embrac'd by many Learned Men. The Word ἀπ' ἑαυτοῦ, here used, signifies any kind of Suffocation, which they think may naturally be caus'd from extrem Anguish of Mind and Despair; at least that 'tis possible for a Man to stop his own Breath, and thereby kill himself, Instances whereof Histo-

rians give us — to which Condition *Judas* being brought, he must necessarily fall to the Ground, and that with great weight, as a dead Man does; by which Fall his Body being before disposed for such an Accident by Suffocation, and the particular Judgment of God so ordering things, as a greater mark of his Vengeance on the *Traitor*, his Body might burst asunder, as we have seen those which have in our own Age, and his Bowels rush out at the *Orifice*. Either of these Opinions are probable, and take which he will, the Contradiction vanishes. For his Purchasing this Field, whereas the *Priests* and *Elders* did it, altho' in strictness of speaking he can't be said to have bought it himself; yet in the common Latitude of Expression it may be affirm'd he bought it, since 'twas his Money paid for't, tho' he left it to their Disposal.

Quest. 8. *Whether we are to resolve all Differences in Religion out of the Word of God?*

Ans. All differences in Essential things are by that only to be decided, and are there plainly enough provided for. Lesser Matters are to be fix'd by lawful Authority, tho' still with respect to the general Rules there laid down.

Quest. 9. *How know you precisely what is the true Word of God, and that the Copies and Translations which we have are such, since we ne'er saw the Originals?*

Ans. By the forementioned Indications, if 'tis a *Papist* proposes this Question, I'd ask him how he knows the *Councils and Fathers* to be genuine? since he neither has the Originals; nor if he had. Knows the Hands, nor could be sure that they are not Counterfeited — He therefore satisfies himself by the concurring Evidence of those who have transmitted such Writings to him, comparing the Writings themselves with each other, and with others of the same Age. Now this Evidence I have, and yet more — I have the Testimony of his Church, of all the World besides, and of the very Books themselves, compared with themselves and each other. If a *Protestant* makes the same Question, I'd ask him how he knows our present Laws to be the same our Ancestors made, since Records, &c. are but of a later Date? Or how he knows the *Deeds and Evidences* of his Estate to be the same with the Original Writings which were made and seal'd many Years, perhaps Ages since? And whether supposing there should be one or two Letters mistaken in the Writings, he'd for that Reason throw 'em all away? In a word, I have all the Reason in the World for the Affirmative, whereas none can be brought for the Negative.

Quest. 10. *What's the meaning of that in the Psalms — Who feedest the Ravens which call upon thee?*

Ans. The most Correct Translations have it only thus — *He giveth the Beast his Food, and to the young Ravens which cry* — And accordingly the best Interpreters Paraphrase it: That God (by his Common Providences) satisfies the Hunger of those ravenous Creatures, tho' they are continually crying for New Supplies; as we know their Nature is.

✂ The several strange Relations concerning a Woman with Child, lately sent us from Maryland, shall be inserted in the 12 Numbers that compleat our Third Volume, with our Thoughts upon the whole.

✂ The Supplement to the Second Volume of the *Atkian Mercury*, containing an Account of the Design and Scope of the most considerable Books newly Printed in all Languages, &c. In this Supplement are Answer'd many of the Questions lately sent us. Price 1 s.

✂ The Preface, Index, and 12 Numbers, that compleat the first 18 Numbers of our 2d Volume, were lately publish'd all together, at 12 d. Price. In these 12 Numbers, (and in our First Volume) are also Answer'd many of the Questions lately sent us. Price One Shilling. Both sold at the Raven in the Poultry.

Advertisement.

WE shall insert something in Our next Mercury, which will be very serviceable to the Publick.

✂ No Letters for the future will be taken in, whole Postage is not paid for.

LONDON, Printed for John Dunton at the Raven in the Poultry. 1691.