

The Athenian Mercury.

Quest. *A* Bout twelve years ago a Tradesman in this Town, who was newly set up, married a young Woman who was about seventeen years of age, her Relations were dead, her Fortunes were 600 l. which was paid him down on the day of Marriage; the Woman quickly found that her Husband neglected his Trade, which made her the more careful to get an insight into it her self, and being a quick and industrious Woman, in a little time she understood and managed the Trade as well as any Man could do; thus for eight years they lived together creditably, quietly and comfortably, as any couple in the World, she being the fondest and best Wife (as he used to say) that ever Man had; in that eight years they had six Children, three of them are still living. Tho' this man was idle, yet for eight years he was no great spender, but since that time is fallen to Gaming, Drinking, &c. and has now spent and consumed all that ever they are worth, and run himself so in debt, that it is expected every day when he shall be thrown into Prison. They have not for these four years lien in Bed together, which no body knew till he told it to one of his Neighbours, to whom he also declared, that for these two years he has not been capable of lying with any Woman: This Neighbour of his is a single Man, has a free Estate of 300 l. per annum, and has made to the other this proposal, that if he and she would both consent, he (the single man) would take her to him as his Wife, that he would be bound to maintain the three Children, and to give them 100 l. a piece when they shall come to the age of twenty years; That he will settle on her 100 l. a year, which at her death she shall have power to dispose of as she pleases; and that he will allow him the said Husband 20 l. a year for his maintenance. — The Man presently consents, and was over-joyed at his good fortune; away they both went to the Woman, and told her what they had agreed on if she would consent thereto, and both urged it to her as much as possible, but she obstinately denies, saying, that she is not satisfied but that it is Adultery so to do. Now, whether is it not the same thing in the sight of God (in this Womans case) as tho' her Husband were really dead, since in the first place he never took care for her maintenance; and since he has not for these two years been capable of performing Matrimonial Duties? I'll assure you the whole Relation is true to a Tittle.

Ans. We could heartily wish the Relation were not true, as also that the Persons that sent it had given themselves the liberty of thinking, what the meaning of these words are, For better for worse, till death do us part, which were so solemnly vowed in the presence of God, &c. how ridiculously impious it looks, to cajole Heaven, and to make Bargains with God, as if he were a Man; nay, and so silly a one too, as to be over-reach'd;

but, mistake not your selves, God is not mocked, nor can any plausible pretences take with him, tho' it may with prejudicate persons. It had been as reasonable to have propos'd Leases in Heaven, or to offer Security for a hundred years maintenance in the grave. 'Tis enough for the injur'd to seek for Justice, and not the injurious themselves. The unhappy good-natur'd Woman, whose Modesty respect, &c. would not suffer her to divulge her Husbands Infamy, & her own barbarous Treatment does certainly deserve better, than to be brought into further Unhappiness. If the Proposers object, that the Law it self allows Divorces, we answer, it does so, both the Law of God, and the Law of this Land; and they both make Adultery to be a sufficient warrant: Adultery is not here mentioned, but 'tis to be feared 'tis too great a truth, for his virtuous Wife could not make him in the condition represented. Nay, if Adultery it self be granted (tho' none but the most infatuated wretches love Calumny and Dishonour, if caus'd by their own Conduct) yet the Law acts regularly, Divorcement may be from Bed and Board, but second Marriages are not suffer'd, or if they were, what need of 20 l. per annum to the first Husband and Portions to the Children, since it might have been done without? that very part of the proposal argues guilt, and an indispensable Obligation? but we'll suppose the Law of the Land would allow a second Marriage in case of Adultery (tho' it does not) perhaps no History or Records will afford an example, so full of folly, disgrace, unkindness, and ridicule as this. But to the particulars of the Question, whether non-maintenance, &c. render not her husband dead in the sight of God, we answer no, both the qualifications specify'd, have been manifested, and the forbearance of either through an impossibility cannot now have the contrary effect, for we have not one president for it either in Law, History or Divinity.

Quest. *Is it not better to Dye than Live?*

Ans. The Question ought to have particularized one of these, whether is better for good a Man or an ill Man, an Animal or a Vegetative to Dye or Live, and then a Direct solution might have been given; but supposing the Question means in General Terms, we answer, that Life is much more desirable than Death, by a common Instinct of self preservation, all Creatures shun that great Evil Death. 'Tis the greatest of all Evils, because a destruction of all good, a Creature is much more noble in its due proportions and shapes, than when it lies in its corruption or Chaos of Earth, in the last there is nothing in't desirable, in respect either of it

it self or the rest of the Creation, but in the first there's particular impresses of, and Communications from the Great Divine Original Good; nay a good man himself, whatever the Stoicks dream'd of, would be afraid of the Grave, were he not in hopes of living again; Life is the all of every Being, being a part of him who is the Fountain of Life; what perfection, happiness, enjoyment, &c. can be expected in Nothingness? All that can be pretended in favour of the contrary opinion, is the absence of Evil; there (say they) we shall meet with no Crosses, Disappointments, Pain, Misery, and (in short) none of the Evils of Life. To which I answer, that the presence of Good is more desirable, than the absence of Evil, again, every individual Animal of the Creation may be happy, Birds, Beasts and Fishes, seek no further than Moderate well temper'd Elements, to fly, breathe, and swim in, and sufficient food to live upon, when they enjoy this, they can seek no farther, and if so, they must be happy, for if not, they would seek for happiness in something else; Man only that irregular, restless Lump, who knows no Medium of things, but is much more happy or miserable than all the rest of the Creation, is not left destitute of his rest and end, to wit, God; if he will be so inconsiderate, notwithstanding his frequent disappointments, to renew his search after happiness, where it is not to be found, he has only himself to blame, but he has no cause to accuse Heaven, who has taken care enough for his happiness, unless he expects to be made happy against his Will.

Quest. Is not Opinion the strongest thing in the World?

Ans. No: Reason or Truth is much stronger. If it be objected, that that must be the strongest which conquers most, but above half the World is rul'd by Opinion, therefore it is the strongest. — We answer that the Major Proposition, is faulty, since it does not suppose (as it should) an equality in the subjects to be Conquer'd, as for instance; a strong Cat (pardon the Metaphor) may kill but six Rats, whilst a weak one, shall kill a dozen Mice; thus Reason and Opinion in making their Conquests, chuse different subjects to work upon, but above three quarters of the World being weak, unthinking persons, Opinion makes a greater Conquest of 'em, than reason does upon those few that it can find worthy its Empire.

Quest. Hath the World any kindness in't but Interest?

Ans. No: 'Tis Selfishness and our own dear Interest that is at the root of all friendship, not to mention those little benefits for by-ends which are so common in the World, we'll go to the greatest Instances and Proofs of Friendship; nay, we'll surmount these too, and go to those Obligations where mutual Flesh and Blood cannot be heard to make their Plea in this case; and amongst the rest,

if we consider the brave sayings of the Philosopher, of loving Vertue for its own sake, and the common rapture of some of our Divines too, who tell us of loving God for his own sake; these are great sayings, but perhaps have more of the Platonick Spirit in 'em than Reason, I wou'd (and that with as much Modesty as the honour of Truth will warrant) ask these persons the meaning of that passage in St. John, We love him, because he first loved us. St. John that beloved Disciple had the greatest flights and assurances, but he excludes not Self in the Enumeration. And 'tis impossible it shou'd be otherwise, I cannot do my friend a kindness, freely (as we say) but I do it, because I my self having the satisfaction in serving my Friend. Nay, suppose I die to save my Friends life, which is the greatest Testimony (if any) of an uninterested Friendship; yet even there my own sweet self is chiefly concern'd; for in so doing it is a greater satisfaction to me to die for him, than not. 'Tis so in Martyrdom for Christ's sake, the pleasure in that great Office by manifesting and declaring this glory, design, and secure our own.

Quest. How does a Spirit become visible?

Answer. A Spirit cannot become Visible, 'tis not an object for a Material Eye, being it self not Matter. What appears to us is something that a Spirit assumes, as Condens'd Air, or the like wherein it acts.

Quest. What reason can you assert why the Miracled Stones on Salisbury Plain can't be number'd. I design to go that way speedily, if you will give me your opinion what method I should use, I'll spare no costs to accomplish my design in numbring 'em?

Ans. Numbring is the prerogative and right of Rational Beings, that we may number, and number perfectly is certain to a demonstration, unless hindered by some Superior Agent, we are forbidden numbring in two cases (unless superstitiously) by Heaven, nor can I ever believe that our free will is restrained in it. I'm sure Angels and Spirits act not without particular Commission in any thing we do, and sure I am, whatever power good Angels may have over us by Commission, the Devil and his Angels can't hinder us, unless we are become so little as to be his Servants, by false perswasion and a blinded Faith, I mean as to any operations they can have over us, by the means of Number, Charms, Characters, &c. So that our advice is either to let 'em alone, which would shew a great command over your self at such an opportunity, and also a slighting the Devil, by not honouring him so far as to doubt of his power by a tryal, but if you are resolv'd to try, because you think it a Fable: use your own reason in marking a place to begin at, as you would in other things, if there be really any thing in it, as to an impossibility of Numbring 'em, pray give us a particular Account of your Tryal, at your return, and you shall have our further thoughts upon the whole.