

The Athenian Mercury.

Qu. 1. **VV**hat is the reason (if any) that a Bible having a Key fastned in the middle, and being held between the two fore-fingers of two persons will turn round after some words said, as if one desires to find out a Thief, a certain verse taken out of a Psalm is to be repeated, and those who are suspected nominated, and if they are guilty, the Book and Key will turn, else not; one who hath lately seen that Experiment, rather to amazement than satisfaction, desires your thoughts upon it, and whether there's any sin in making tryal of such a thing?

Ans. We have light upon several Instances of this Nature, which are matter of fact, and our Opinion is that 'tis much of the nature of Spells, Charms, &c. the Devil can only act after this manner, where he finds credulous unthinking persons to work upon; as we have said formerly in the case of Charms for the Tooth Ach, so we may say here, that 'tis wicked and unreasonable. Nor can it be any wonder at all that the Devil makes use of some place in Scripture to palliate his Juggles, for if he should enjoyns Cursing, Blasphemies, &c. he would appear too bare fac'd. I remember one particular instance of a Charm for the Tooth Ach, which after a sort of a Dialogue between our Saviour and Peter upon the Tooth Ach, it ended thus, *In the Name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*, and this Charm had effects according to the belief of such persons as made use of it. Of this nature are the Charms for Witchcraft, and amongst the rest, there's a custom that the Bewitched party, is to Pinch, Bite, Scratch or Prick the Witch till she draws Blood, and then she's well; thus the Devil cures one Disease of the Body to make another in the Soul; God commands, thou shalt do no Murder, under which is comprehended beating, affronts, &c. No, says the Devil, *break this Command*, and I'll cure the Distemper. There's no virtue in Words, Charms, &c. 'tis so ridiculously silly that the wisest of those that use 'em can give no account at all how they act; or what reason there should be for such things. 'Tis in short in the Devil, that puts the Cheat upon people, and all that act implicitly what he enjoins, do own their dependance upon him, and despise the ordinary methods of Providence.

We have a great many Questions sent us about Thunder, Lightning, Adam and Eve, &c. already answered.

Qu. 2. Why do various the contrary Effects cause equal Laughter?

Ans. We'll suppose an Instance in Wit and Folly, as when a handsom Satyr or Repartee is presented, we are incited to Mirth; as also an Impartial Silly one has the same Effect. To answer which we are to maintain

stand that the Senses are acquainted with Objects, before the Intellect can have an Idea or Conception of 'em, as in the afore-mentioned Instances; first we hear, and then the Intellect takes cognizance of the nature of the sound or expression, but finding something uncommon (for indifferent things cannot move Laughter) is accordingly affected, and as a demonstration of it, urges the Passion of Laughter by a titillation of the Arteries, and a contraction of the Muscles; so that 'tis a wrong supposition, in thinking 'tis the Object that is the cause of Laughter, but the facetious apprehension of the Intellect; for if it was the Object, then every one wou'd laugh at the same Object, which sometimes is diversly apprehended by divers Intellects, that it causes quite contrary Effects, as in the Instance of *Heraclitus* and *Democritus*, one laugh'd at the Vanity of the World, and the other wept at the same. A small motion of the Passions causes a smile, a little greater causes laughing out-right, a little more than that, causes such a hearty laughter, that 'tis accompanied with tears, the next degree above that causes weeping, the next above that such a confusion of the Spirits, that we can neither cry nor laugh; and 'tis this last which affords us some Instances of People that have died immediately. Now we having shewn, that 'tis not the Object, but the Conception of that Object that has the aforesaid Effect, the supposition falls to the ground, and the Question needs no further answer.

Qu. 3. What is Reason, and how are we to distinguish between Rational and Irrational Creatures, since a Fox, a Dog, an Elephant, &c. seem to act much beyond some persons?

Ans. We hope we have given a satisfactory Account as to the Definition of Reason, in Vol. 2. N. 1. Q. 15. By which also you may know how to distinguish between Rational and Irrational Creatures. We don't deny Reason to a Dog, a Fox, an Elephant, and more Creatures, according to the Definition some wou'd give of it; but we deny 'em the power of apprehending simple and abstracted Notions, as universals, &c. They cannot Number, Compound, Divide, &c. But consult the above mentioned Definition, and you'll be further satisfied.

Qu. 4. Why drowned Bodies float after nine days time, and whether the common saying is true that attributes it to the breaking of the Gall?

Ans. We not long since had a Question sent us, why Men swim with their faces upwards, when drowned, and Women with their faces downward, which we have deny'd upon experience of the contrary: Nor

we can mend the matter, to wit,

veluti pudori, &c. Nature modestly ordaining that posture to conceal the shame of the dead; for if so, why not in both Sexes? *Adam and Eve* were both ashamed in Paradise after their transgression. *Scaliger* disliking this reason, studies another; viz. *Quod ventre vasto sunt Mulieres, &c.* from the different make of Men and Women; but we find both Man and Women generally swim with their face downward, as we have said already in the fore-mentioned Question. In like manner some have studied why the breaking of the Gall shou'd make drown'd people swim upon the Water, when that is not the cause; nor is nine days the certain *Crisis of floating*, but sometimes more, and sometimes less; 'tis the putrefaction and corruptive fermentation (as Learned Enquirers into Nature affirm) that is the proper and only cause; for the Body by a putrefaction suffers a turgescence and inflation, and becoming airy and spumous, mounts up to the top of the Water, most commonly (but not always) at nine days end. This is evident in Eggs, Nutts, &c. sound ones sink, and the rotten or defective swim. 'Tis said, that *Rhodiginus* the Tyrant caused the Bodies of those persons he murdered, to have their Lungs taken out when thrown into the River, but to no purpose. Experiment has been made upon *Cats and Mice*, which have had their Lungs, Galls, Gutts and Bladder taken out, and yet have swum, tho' in a longer time, which shews, that the reason of Bodies floating upon the Water, is the same which is before assigned.

Quest. 5. *Whether the Sky be of any colour?*

Ans. No. If you mean by Sky the *Aether*; nor are Clouds of any colour naturally, but what they receive by reflection from different Lights.

Quest. 6. *One that pretends to Religion has rendred himself a great Knave to me in a particular action, which is not my own Judgment, but others also, it being too plain a matter of Fact to be denied; pray how am I as a Christian, to carry myself to this person, it being a Christian duty to forgive Injuries? and whether such base actions ought to be conceal'd out of tenderness as a Christian, or made publick, that others Persons may not be injur'd by him?*

Ans. We find no where that we are enjoyn'd to forgive Injuries before our pardon is desir'd, but only to be always ready to do it upon that condition. 'Tis the Method that God uses with us, tho' we ought to tell 'em of it in a friendly manner, that we may have an opportunity to express our forgiveness to 'em; if after all he persists, pity him, and look upon him as a stranger to you. As for concealing or divulging his fault, you must consider his relation to you; if he be under your *Economy or Government*, you are answerable for what mischief you might hinder in giving others warning; but if you have not that power over him, you ought to conceal his failings, only as you have opportunity you may at a distance cau-

tion such as have to deal with him in the World, which you may prudently do, and yet be tender of his Reputation.

Quest. 7. *Whether one who perceives no real, essential, fundamental difference betwixt the Church of England and the Presbyterian Party, as to the manner of Worship and Preaching, whether such a one may with a safe Conscience not only hear both Parties, but receive the Sacrament sometimes in one Church, and sometimes in the other?*

Ans. The Querist might have chang'd the word, *perceive no real, &c.* into *is no real, &c.* for they are really one as to fundamentals, and one so persuaded may with a safe Conscience communicate with either; and let these that keep up the Partition Wall, take heed lest they are thereby excluded out of the Bond of Charity, which makes all of one mind, and partakers of the same Privileges.

Quest. 8. *A Man rehearsing a Story told by another, rehears'd the others Oaths also, query, whether such Rehearsal of Oaths is sinful? and also whether it comes within the penalty which our Laws enjoin for Swearing?*

Ans. The Law is not concern'd in it, no more than if the Oaths were read out of a Book; but yet notwithstanding this, there might be a sin in the Rehearsal of the Sacred Name of God, &c. if it were not used with reverence, being thereby guilty of breach of the third Commandment; and 'tis hard to use the Name of God reverently in an idle Story, or in common discourse.

Quest. 9. *Whether to commit Fornication, or eat black Puddings be a greater sin?*

Ans. The first excludes out of Heaven, the last does not. For those Texts *Acts 15. 20. and 29 verses*, were design'd for a few believing Gentiles at *Antioch*, who were yet newly converted to Christianity; so that this was to comply with the new Converts amongst the Jews, whose Consciences were weak and tender about the abrogation of their Ceremonial Laws, — for the Holy Ghost, and the whole Council of the Elders at *Jerusalem* condescended to such weaknesses for a time, rather than keep up the Partition Wall, but never condescended to dispense with any Fundamentals of Christianity: That this is the genuine meaning of the Text, you have our Saviours words, *Nothing that goeth into a man, defileth a man, &c.* Also the Apostles, — *Whatever is set before you, eat, making no Questions for Conscience sake.* And many more such passages.

Quest. 10. *Why should a Tom-Tit, being the least of Birds, generally have more young ones than another?*

Ans. Nature supplies the useless, inconsiderable, worthless nature of the Bird by its number, and on the contrary affords us with few of the most useful considerable Creatures; as a Cow or a Mare produce one only at a time, and the Elephant, which is the most useful of all Creatures, goes three years with young, and then brings forth but one young one.