

# The Athenian Mercury:

Tuesday, November 3. 1691.

Quest. 1. **W**Hether a Comprehension, or the Uniting of Conformists and Nonconformists, been't necessary for the Reforming of England?

Ans. Yes undoubtedly — because the Schism it self, on which side soever the fault lyes, is a great Sin and Scandal, and highly needs Reformation — for that there is a Schism, is as plain as that One and One are not One, but Two; since there are different Churches, different Communications, and Hearts more different and opposite than either. This Union is further necessary, even to PERSONAL REFORMATION, because the want thereof has so much obstructed it, Persons being more concern'd for their own particular Tenents than for common Christianity; nay, entertaining the most bitter, scurrilous and prophane Scoffs against the contrary Party, even in their most solemn and religious Performances, with Approbation and Pleasure — as let those concern'd say what they will, such whose Conversation is but any way general, cannot but have seen and heard Instances of but too many: And thus while one laughs at the others PREACHING, and the other at his PRAYING, the Atheist laughs at both, and there are very many believe neither. Besides, the World is so foolishly ill-natur'd, that opposite Parties commonly are out of spite either careless or negligent in any Christian Duty which they see their Opposers strict or eminent in performing. Another Reason is that, *Rebus sic stantibus*, we see not how the ancient Church-Discipline, so much desired, and the loss thereof so much lamented, can ever be renew'd, without which it's not very likely such a REFORMATION as is desired should take very large steps among us: Since as things now are, let a Person be Excommunicated in our Church, he has the Dissenters to fly to; in theirs he flies to us, or indeed keeps between both, rails at all, and is of neither. Again, while this fatal and scandalous Division lasts, it cannot be avoided, but there will still be different Interests, and that powerful ones, whose struggle will be not only dangerous to the State, but breed Animosities, Strife and Bitterness in the different Parties — Which God knows whether ever we shall be so happy to see Composed and Ended.

Quest. 2. Whether a Regulation in the Electing of Members to serve in Parliament will not greatly Contribute to the REFORMATION so much spoken of and desired? or can it be a compleat Reformation without it? and would not such a Regulation crown the present Endeavours, and be a Means to provide for the Establishment of the Reformation begun, and for the lasting continuance thereof?

Ans. — Sed quis custodiat ipsos? &c. That such a thing would be of excellent Use upon divers accounts, and especially to the good Work the Querist mentions, there's no manner of doubt to be made — But all the Craft is, how shall such a Regulation be accomplish'd? for it must be done in Parliament, and consented to by those who are so much Parties — that we can neither with Safety or good Manners say any more on so tender a Subject.

Quest. 3. Whether Men of Understanding, virtuous and sober Lives, and true Lovers of their Countrey; and in a word, the best of Men, are not the fittest of Men to be chosen Members of that Honourable Society?

Ans. There's no more doubt to be made of this than the former — But where shall we find enough of 'em, (out of Parliament) who fill up that Character? And upon this Question we shall take the Liberty of Free-men and English-men, and advise those who have VOTES, (in any future Parliament) as they Value their Conscience, their Countrey or their Honor, to Choose such Persons as deserve so high an Employment: And in order thereunto shall give such Directions as we are confident no honest Man will dislike, if Interest does not extremly byass his Judgment.

1. That those they gives their Votes for, be Men of Sense and Ability; by which we mean, not only of sound Reason, but well vers'd in the Interests of their Countrey, and of all Europe; and in a word, fit to make up a part of one of the most august Assemblies in the World.

2. That they be firm Friends and Lovers of the present Establishment in Church and State, yet no Biggots nor Hot-heads, who are the unfittest Men in the World to make Laws for others, when they han't Prudence enough to rule themselves, those Extreams being the certain Arguments both of weak and narrow Souls.

3. That they be Men, as far as can be guess'd, of true Piety, which can only be known by their virtuous, sober and religious Conversation: — For such as these will neither be Corrupted by all the Gold of France, nor Sway'd by any Faction in England, nor so soon byass'd by any little private Interest, injurious to the Publick Benefit of the Nation.

Thus have we endeavour'd to Answer the Gentlemans second Question — but alas we may be yet far enough from making any such Choice; for while the Electors are govern'd by Passion, or Interest, or Vice it self, it's not like their Votes should be any juster than themselves; and 'tis too certain, that most of those Qualifications mention'd, would bring their Owners many Enemies, for no other Reason but because they were so. Considering then the Present State of Affairs, we doubt the Reformation must be more general, and begin below, as it has already above, before it can reach the middle.

Quest. 4. What Methods will be best to take, that such Persons may be Elected, and being Chosen, that they may be duely Returned?

Ans. This is rather a Parliament Business, than the Work of such a Paper — A little more Wit and Honesty 'tis true, and a little less Drink and Money would do the Work without it — But the two first of these Commodities are much more scarce than the two last: The former of which is almost always the great Hinge of Elections, and the latter too often of Returns: For it can't be imagin'd how much it inclines a Scribes Hand to slip, when 'tis cramm'd full of Guinea's, or even his Head it self to mistake, when some particular Interest or Faction — fills every Cell of his Brain. Some Persons have propos'd, and that with Reason enough, that the Penalty of False Returns should be greater, both on the Returner and the Returned — for 'tis an easie matter if worst comes, to pay a small Summe of Money for a good Friend, who has forfeited Conscience, Honour, Soul and all, to Oblige a Gentleman: Whereas, were the Penalty in this Case more severe, and upon that side it can hardly offend; the Crime having perhaps as bad or worse Consequences than the very highest of those which we make Capital; (however certainly a little more hainous than Stealing an Old Mare or Thirteen-pence-half-penny.) We say, were the Penalty, Entire Forfeiture of personal and real Estate, making the Family eternally Infamous, by some Publick Brand set upon 'em, and rendring 'em utterly incapacitated for any future Employment — This would make those who are concern'd, a little more afraid of Burning their Fingers. — But whether we shall ever live to see such a happy Regulation — N. L.

Quest. 5. Whether to purchase Votes with Money, or procure 'em by Treats to Excess with Wine or strong Drink, &c. be not an irregular and unfair Proceeding? — And can such Persons have a true aim at the right Ends of Government, who endeavour to be Chosen by Methods so repugnant and contrary thereunto? — And can any true English-man, who is willing to serve as a Member in Parliament, out of a true Zeal for the good of his Countrey, and having nothing else in his Eye, give Countenance and Encouragement to so ignoble and base a Choice?

Ans. To purchase single Votes with Money, is so base and mean a Thing, that we can hardly think there's any that pretend to be Gentlemen can be guilty on't.

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To procure or obtain 'em only by *Treats*, &c. is much the same with the other — but there's some difference betwixt *procuring Votes* by these *Treats*, as they are here call'd, and only allowing some moderate refreshment to those who perhaps come many miles to give them, and must toil and sweat in a *Crowd* sometimes a whole Day, before their Votes can be taken: — However, so great and scandalous is the abuse in things of this Nature, and so vast is the consequence thereof, that 'twou'd perhaps be happy for England if this custom were entirely left off, nay, forbidden by some severe Penalty: for the people have more need to hear a *Sermon*, or some good Discourse, directing 'em in their Choice, before they set about it, than to make themselves Brutes before they come to choose Members of an Assembly that is to regulate the Affairs of almost all the World. But the misery is, That *rebus sic stantibus*, Let a Gentleman have the *Virtue* of a Saint, and the *Wisdom* of an Angel, if he'll not use the accusom'd Methods, and liquor *Mobs Throat*, he gets not a Soul of 'em to lift up their Voice or Hands in his behalf — And the charge is now grown so extravagant, that there are many Elections which cut away from a Gentlemans Estate, what wou'd formerly have been thought a good Fortune for one of his Children, --which makes many deserving Gentlemen of the clearest Sence and Reputation, and excellently accomplish'd to serve their Countrey, sit at home (while others of much less Merit are most forward Candidates,) rather than injure their Families, to humour the extravagance of a drunken Crowd. As to what is pleaded of the peoples fatigue, they might be moderately refresh'd, when the Work was ended at much less expence than usual on such occasions — But this might be discharg'd with much more Justice, by the Countrey than the Candidate, since 'tis for their service that the Gentlemen expose themselves to much more fatigue than going a few miles, or standing in the Field a piece of a day — We mean, taking long Journeys to London, and from the most distant parts of England, and remaining there at great Expences as long as the Sessions hold. But after all, we can see little likelihood of having this Regulated; tho' if ever ADDRESS or PETITION were defensible, or adviseable, 'twou'd be in a thing of this Nature: Not but that we are sensible 'twou'd be no very easie matter to perswade all the worshipful Electors to set their marks to an Abhorrence of Cakes and Ale, since there's a great many of 'em wou'd sooner be brought to part with their Wives and Children.

Quest. 6. Whether the Commons of England assembled in Parliament, are not a Fountain from whence our Laws spring, and will not an industrious Care and concern in the People to preserve that Fountain from Corruption, be in a great degree the effects of Reformation, and a true proof of their earnest Inclination and Delight to drink at a clear Stream?

Ans. To find the Fountain of the English Laws, we must enquire by whose Authority they are Enacted: And that all the Acts of Parliament tell us, is by the King, Lords and Commons, and by the Authority of the same. Therefore King, Lords and Commons, are the Fountain of the English Laws, neither without the other; as we think all true Englishmen have ever granted, and we see not how any can deny, unless such as run madding either after Democracy or Tyranny. It's true, the Question is propos'd cautiously, and the Commons are therein call'd a Fountain, not the Fountain whence the Laws proceed. But Sovereignty in the proper sence of the word, can be but one: Now the Sovereign Power in England, if it be a mixt Monarchy must be in the Parliament, or body of King, Lords and Commons, whereof the King is the Head, tho' consider'd conjoyn'tly with his People, without whom he is no King, and can no more live than a Head separated from a Body. This Sovereignty, we say, where-ever 'tis, must be one, tho' the Administration thereof is by the Constitution of our Countrey in different Hands. The Executive Power is in the King, all Writs and Forms of Law running in his Name, whereby we come as near as we can to the advantage of absolute Monarchy, without the mischief and inconvenience, namely, closeness of Councils, and readiness of Execution. The Legislative power is mix't in both, for both their Consents, both

their Authorities are requir'd to any Law. The Power of the Purse is in the Lords and Commons own keeping, tho' the Sword in the King's, and tho' the King's Consent is requir'd to the granting any Taxes, (but we have many Instances of Money Bills not passing.) And this secures us from the inconvenience of absolute Monarchy: --He who has both Law and Money on his side, may make his Subjects Slaves whenever he pleases; that people who have them in their own Hands, if they are Slaves 'tis their own Faults. Now these three, King, Lords and Commons, according to the Constitution of England, are as has been said, but one Body in Parliament, and but one Authority inherent in 'em all together. Therefore our Laws cannot be properly said to have more than one Fountain, namely, the High Court of Parliament.

Now as to the Head thereof, thanks to Heaven we have already such a one as every good man, and true Englishman wou'd wish to have, might he be put to his Choice. As for the Ordines Regni, the Lords and Commons, not to enter into the thorny Question, how the three Estates are to be divided, we shall only say in Reference to the Reformation mention'd and desired, as to the Lords, that the example of such a King, and both the Examples and Precepts of so many of their Members, the Lords spiritual, than whom even Envy it self must grant that never better men fill'd the Pastoral Chairs, these things, their own Consciences and Honours, and Time may we hope make them answer the Ends for which they enjoy their Dignities, and be themselves Examples to others in this Reformation. For the Commons we have discours'd of 'em in the last Question, and made that our Conclusion which is the chief Subject of the present Query. And thus much of the Questions relating to the Parliament, which being on the same Subject, and sent all by the same person, we have answered here all together.

Quest. 7. Whether a Kingdom of the Peoples giving be worth taking?

Ans. So it has been thought, or else how comes there to be so much striving to be King of Poland? But further, we should hardly have had any Kings in the World without it, since either force or consent is confessedly the Original of all the Kingdoms at present being, (for the Patriarchal story is out of doors) and whether of these two shall be thought the more manly way of attaining power? But we doubt there's more poison in this Query than appears, which we shall endeavour to provide an Antidote against without discovering it more plainly. We say then, and are pretty confident we can make it good, that the Kingdom of England neither is, nor ever was Elective, unless perhaps partly so in its Original, on some peculiar single Instances which can't make a Denomination, any more than it on the contrary the Son to the present King of Poland shou'd happen to succeed his Father in that Kingdom, wou'd the Crown thereupon cease to be Elective, and deserve the name of Hereditary. We yet go further, and add, that neither can there be said to be so much as an Instance of an Election, where an Abdication of the prior Possessor, a proper and a Derivative Right, a Right if not of a Conqueror, yet of a Deliverer, come in for shares in so great an Event.

Quest. 8. Whether the Government encourages this Reformation for Gods sake or their own?

Ans. Undoubtedly for Both: For our Comfort is God and the King are now on the same side.

¶ We have receiv'd a Question, and something very remarkable, relating to the GUN-POWDER-PLOT, which shall be Answer'd next Saturday.

¶ The Ladies Questions shall be Answer'd next Tuesday.

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