

# The Athenian Mercury:

Saturday, January 23. 1691.

Quest. 1. **A**T what time of the Year was it that our Saviour was born, or whether it is possible, since the Learned seem to disagree about the month, to find the exact Anniversary day of his Nativity?

Ans. We shall here, to obviate another Question sent by the same hand, consider the various Changes that the Year has undergone: And first we find that Romulus began it in the Month of March, making only ten Months to the Year, which contain'd in all 304 days. Numa reform'd this Calendar, and made the Year contain 12 months 354 days; but as some believe, being a little Superstitious as to the sound of Numbers, he added one more, which made 355. But this Calendar suffer'd its predecessors fate, and was again alter'd by Julius Caesar, who sent for one Sif-genes the fam'd Astronomer of Alexandria, who fram'd a new Calendar upon the Suns motion, which finishes its Circuit in 365 days, and six hours, which were divided into twelve unequal Months, as at this day, and these months were again subdivided into Calends, Nones and Ides, so frequently made mention of in the dates of the Roman Writings, this is that which is called the Julian Account.

After this the Council of Nice, upon some unhappy Disputes amongst the Primitive Christians about the Observation of Easter, Christmas, &c. regulated the account of Julius Caesar, which was about 11 minutes longer than the Solar Year, and above the Golden Number, whose full revolution bringing not the Moon back to the same point, disagrees with the Calendar. In Julius Caesars time, the vernal Equinoxe commenc'd 23d. of March. But Pope Gregory, (from whence comes the Gregorian Account) by his Bull published 1581. ordain'd, That in the following Year the fourth day of October, shou'd be chang'd into the 15th. which is the reason of the difference betwixt our Accounts here in England, and theirs beyond Sea, which is held 10 days before ours by all Forreign Catholicks (not the Greeks and Reformed Churches) because establish'd by the Pope.

But to prevent any more Questions that may be ask'd upon this Subject, we shall show how Leap-year (not understood by every body) comes about; according to the Nabonassor and Julian Account, the Year consisting of 365 days, six hours and more, the odd six hours were never reckon'd for 3 years together, but the fourth Year only, because 4 times 6 hours makes 24 hours, or one natural Day, which they all placed February the 29. at the four years end, February having but 28 days the other 3 years, that the 6 hours are not reckon'd.

And now for the precise time of our Saviours Birth, tho' some have assign'd the 20th. of April, others 16th of May, some the 17th. of April, yet we have reason enough to believe it the 25th. of December, tho' perhaps knowing the exact time is not absolutely necessary for our happiness. Cleaves Alexandrinus reckons from the birth of Christ to the death of Commodus exactly 194 years 1 month, and 13 days. Ezevov τὰν ἀπορίας τὸν Κόσμον, &c. Strom. lib. p. 249. according to the Nabonassor Account, which left out the 6 odd hours, for the Egyptians began their Account with the Month Thoth. Now the first day of our March, according to their Account, will be seven hundred years hence the first of September, and 700 after that it will be upon the first of March again: So that we must deduce one Month and 18 days for those odd hours, and so reckoning the Birth of Christ from the Death of Commodus, which happened on the first of January, to be 194 years, wanting five or six days, it will appear that Christ was born the five or six and twentieth day of December. There are some other Questions sent by the same hand, which we have not room for at this time.

Quest. 2. What did Solomon mean by his not knowing the way of a young man with a Maid, Prov. 30. v. 19. when 'tis certain he had a thousand Wives and Concubines, and 'twas hard, &c.

Ans. Perhaps he meant the Effects of that unruly Passion were unaccountable, for so his Failings evinc'd; tho' so Wise a Man.

Quest. 3. There was a poor Man a Carpenter, who in the exercise of his Trade cut off two of his Fingers, carries them in his other hand to the Lady for whom he was then at work, who affixt them to their proper places an hour after cut off, made some applications, with which they were healed, and are now as useful to him as any of his Fingers: Pray your reasons for it?

Ans. There, &c. 'Tis absolutely impossible according to Nature, we know not but the Lady of Loretto might be the Doctress, if so, Ecce Miraculum.

Quest. 4. Whether bowing at the Name of Jesus be sinful?

Ans. When the Commands of the Magistrate bind us not to any precise Form or Mode of Worship as to kneeling, standing, &c. (neither good nor bad in themselves) forbidding the omission of any such Modes, or the addition of any other, as in the Act of Uniformity, Car. 2. par. — then it is sinful because not enjoy'd by the Act, but indefinitely forbidden; but where (as is the present Case) the Magistrate has dispens'd with these severer Obligations, the Case is quite alter'd, and all indifferent things are again reduc'd to their first indifference, and therefore whoever looks upon bowing at the Name of Jesus as absolutely necessary, is ignorantly Superstitious, and comes under the Censure of the Apostle, viz. Will-worship: So on the other hand he is equally guilty of Superstition and Will-worship, that looks upon the bowing at the Name of Jesus as sinful, since it is no where forbidden, and since the External Forms of Worship are wholly left to the prudence of Persons, and Customs of places, which our Saviour himself comply'd with in the manner of eating the Paschever, which in its first Institution was very different from his and the Jews latter practices: So that in short this must be the Test of Superstition. — Whatever indifferent thing in Divine Worship is either omitted as essentially wicked in it self, or done as absolutely necessary, 'tis wickedness and Superstition. This is granted by all that distinguish betwixt Names and Things, and whoever denies it, arraigns and censures the practice of his own and all other Churches; for reading or praying, whilst sitting, kneeling, lying or standing, in a Surplice, Coat, Cloak, or Doublet, are all justifiable from the Liberty that God Almighty has left to his Church, and from the Nature of indifferent Actions, and the same Argument that is for or against any of 'em, is equally concluding for or against 'em all.

Quest. 5. Whether bowing towards the Altar is wickedness? and whence came the Original of that practice?

Ans. No, unless he that bows thinks he sins if he shou'd not bow, and even here Sin is too hard a word, and may be softned into that of Ignorance. 'Tis necessary when we come into the Church that we worship God, or why come we there? And if we worship, 'tis necessary our Face shou'd be some way, and why not towards the East. We may bow, or not bow, 'tis all one to them that think it so, but to reverence God with our Bodies, since he has redeem'd them as well as our Souls, is very reasonable: No intelligent person bows towards the Altar, or Communion Table, out of reverence to the Table, but because the Eye meets such an Object there as represents the highest Mysteries of Love and Redemption, which cause (or shou'd cause) a reverential Gratitude to the Author, productive of acknow-





acknowledgments, which may be as properly paid there whilst the thoughts are warm, as in the *Seat*, or any other place. We mean no more than this by bowing towards the Altar; and if weak Consciences believe otherwise, they ought to inform themselves better, before they are either scandaliz'd, or we censur'd; so that to some it may be Sin, to others not, the difference arises from want of Judgment and Information.

To the second part of the Query, we answer, The Original of this Custom we find in the early times of the Primitive Church, in the days of *Justin Martyr*, *Alexandrinus*, &c. which they also mention as a Custom very antequate, and practis'd amongst the Ancient Heathens. *Alexandrinus's* words are these, *Stromat. lib. 7. p. 520.* Let prayers be made towards the East, because the East is the representation of our Spiritual Nativity, as from thence light first arose shining out of darkness: So according to that rising of the Sun the day of true knowledge arose on those who lay buried in Ignorance, &c. the reason of this, turning towards the East, we find to be from this that in the Old Testament, the Title of East is given to our Saviour, the word is *Ἀνατολή*, which signifies an arising, or Sprouting out, in the Greek 'tis rendred *ἀνατολή*, which signifies the same, and this by a Metonymy is appropriated to the East. There are several other reasons which the Ancients give, but we shall pass 'em over, since this is the greatest.

Quest. 6. A certain person has murder'd another, a third is taken up upon Suspicion, is try'd and condemn'd, and now lies in Prison in Ireland, and tho' he has got a long Reprieve yet he is likely to suffer: Query, Whether the Murderer ought to give himself up to the Law, and free the Innocent, or to conceal himself, and leave the Innocent to suffer wrongfully, or be repriev'd from Death by no less than a Miracle?

Ans. 'Twill be a second Murder to let the Innocent suffer, and aggravated by this, That he is Innocent; tho we believe no Man is bound to deliver up himself to the Law for any past breach of it, but to avoid such a future breach of it, he ought to do it, Since Death is rather to be chosen than Sin, and no body can doubt but that it is Sin to be guilty of anothers death: But after all, we believe it very possible to prevent the Death of the Innocent, and of the Refugee Criminal too, viz. By giving timely Notice of it to the proper Magistrate of that place, with offers of true discovery upon Condition of Pardon, or some such like Method; but if after all no Conditions can be got, the Innocents Life ought to be redeem'd with that of the Criminals.

Quest. 5. What's the meaning of the little Circle which we see pictur'd round the Heads of Saints and Martyrs?

Ans. We must go to the Schoolmen for the Resolution of this Question, since the Painters can hardly tell us — 'twas their Doctrine, that there are Degrees of Glory in Heaven. The Essential Glory which all good men shall have, they term *Aurea*; the preeminence of Glory, or some addition to be made to it, they term *Aureola*, or a *Coronet* to be added to the Crown of Glory, which they ascribe to three sorts of persons, Doctors or Prophets, Virgins and Martyrs: Now this Circle represents that *Coronet*, as the Rays the Crown itself.

Quest. 8. Pray let me know in the next Mercury how often a man must send you a Question before you'll answer it, or whether you only answer Questions of your own propounding, as 'tis generally thought?

Ans. To the first part of the Question — He must send till we have room, or think fit to answer, and if he keeps count, he may this way be soon resolv'd; for the latter part, — Whether we only answer Questions of our own proposing, let the Querist himself now be the Judge: But to satisfy him we can show him some Reams already answer'd, and a great many more yet upon the File, where they are many of 'em still like to hang, if the importunate Querists won't follow those Methods propos'd in the Preface of our 2d. Volume.

Quest. 8. You tell us Vol. 1. Num. 26. Qu. 3. That *Jephtha* did not really sacrifice his Daughter, but dedicate her to the Service of God, by obliging her to perpetual Virginity,

and give several (I think) unanswerable Arguments and explanations of that part of the Scripture that relates to this story, in maintenance of your Opinion: But Vol. 3. N. 28. Qu. 2. you say and use several Arguments to support that Opinion, That you cannot but believe *Jephtha* did actually sacrifice his Daughter: This seems to me to contradict your former Judgment on the matter, therefore I desire you to reconcile these accounts with each other?

Ans. See what 'tis to write much; it brings little people as well as the great into contradictions and Errors; for we must acknowledge this more than seems to be a contradiction, since 'tis really one, and that irreconcilable, tho' if the only fault or mistake in all our Mercuries, we are the happiest Writers that ever came in publick, since the ceasing of Inspiration. But we'll not only acknowledge this slip, but tell the Reader how it happen'd. He knows there are several persons of our Society, and tho' we generally all review what is made publick, this happen'd to be omitted when the 2d. Resolution was inserted, tho' we must after all confess the Argument brought therein from the last of *Levit.* has reduc'd our Judgment to a kind of an *Equilibrium* in that Question.

Quest. 9. Whether the late Impostor Mr. Wickam, alias Morris, did believe he shou'd dye when he made such an extravagant Will, and receiv'd the Sacrament? or whether God Almighty did not in Justice take him away for jesting with Death, altho Poverty or any other design might prompt him to such an unheard of Adventure?

Ans. 'Twould be a bold Answer either to determine the thoughts of any persons Hearts (which is only the Privilege of God Almighty,) or to offer the reasons of God Almighty's Proceedings with his Creatures. All that we can say is, that it is one of the strangest Instances we ever met with, if truth; tho we hope there's many circumstances concealed from the World which may much alter the matter of fact. One side is unheard, and can't speak for himself till the Day of Judgment, and 'twould be well if every one would either look at their own failings, or let other persons alone till then.

H. S. Jan. 191. 4

F. K. 161. +

G. T. 272. +

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The Young Students Library is now in the Press, to which will be added a Manuscript Copy relating to the Bible, that has been the result of many years Study, as also a New Essay upon all sorts of Learning, Written by the Athenian Society; which Essay being much larger than was at first design'd, it will inbalance the rate of the said Book to all such who do not subscribe for it, but for such who do, they shall have it given in, together with the Manuscript Copy and those other things promis'd in our Proposals. — We did design that no persons who did not subscribe by the 10th. of this Instant January, should have had any Advantage by our Proposals; but at the earnest request of several who have not yet quite compleated their Setts, we have given till the 20th. of February next for the paying in Subscriptions, but after that time no person whatever must expect any Benefit by our Proposals.

The Proposals for the Young Students Library, are to be had at the Raven in the Poultry.

## Advertisements.

A Funeral Sermon for the Reverend, Holy, and Excellent Divine Mr. Richard Baxter, who deceas'd Decem. 8th. 1691. with some account of his Life: By William Bates, D.D. London Printed for Brabaz Aylmer at the 3 Pidgeons against the Royal Exchange in Cornhill. 1692.

Miscellanea Sacra; containing Scriptural Meditations, Divine Breathings, occasional Reflections, and Sacred Poems. London Printed for John Lawrence at the Angel in the Poultry. 1692.

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