

The Athenian Mercury:

Tuesday, March 1. 1692.

Quest. 1. **I** Intend to Christen my Child next Sunday, and am a Member of the Ch. of England, yet I design no Godfathers for it: Whether 'tis lawful for me to omit them? What's the Reason of their Institution? and why are they continu'd in this Christian Age? and what ground have the Dissenters for their Objections against 'em, that they are unnecessary and can't perform their Charge?

Answe. We must for methods sake invert the order of the Questions, and enquire first, Into the Antiquity and Reason of the Institution of Godfathers or Sureties, then the reason of their Continuation: After which naturally falls in the present Case, and the consideration of the two Objections brought against the custom of our Church. 1. For their Antiquity, many think they were used even in the times of the Prophets, as seems very probable from that passage in Isa. Ch. 8. 2. where at the Birth of Maher-shalal-hazabai, its said, he took unto him Faithful Witnesses, and they were two, Uriah and Zechariah, and this as it shou'd seem according to custom, for we find not he had Gods command for't. But not to insist on this, thō Junius and Tremellius on the place speak of it as granted (with a constat) that hence the Custom was deriv'd, we are sure that 'twas in use among the Jews. The Ruler of the house of Judgment was to take care of the Children of Profelytes, and was call'd their Father, and there was one to hold the Child at Circumcision, call'd the Sponsor, or Surety, as Buxtorf, and their own Writers acquaint us, and as their Custom is to this day, which Sponsor, Susceptor or Surety, is also to answer for the Child. They were also very early in the Christian Church, Justin Martyr mentions 'em about the middle of the 2d. Century, by the Title of *μετονομαστές*, Tertullian about the end of the second Century, or very beginning of the third, by the Name of Sponsors. Dionysius Areop. thō spurious, yet allowedly Ancient, also mentions and styles 'em *Αυτοχρηστές*. St. Austin calls 'em *Fidei-jussores*; their end in using 'em was, as some think, for Sureties both for Parent and Child, least the first shou'd Apostatize or dye, and the second not be sufficiently instructed in the Christian Religion. But the chief design and intention of 'em, we may learn from what the Ancients tell us was their Office both at and after Baptism. At Baptism to make a Formal Contract or Covenant in the Minors name, between God and him, which being Christians, they thought they had right to do, being themselves Faithful, at least, as far as outward profession, and by their Faith entitling the Child to the Benefits of a conditional Covenant. Thus in that very ancient piece, stiled Respons. ad Orthodoxos, τὰ Πρεσβ. Ἰν ἡσεν, &c. Infants are thought worthy to obtain the Benefits of Baptism by the Faith of their Sureties, or Sponsors. So Rabaccus Maurus, who liv'd in the 8th. Century, tells us, 'That the Salvation of Infants is compleated in the Church by the Hearts and mouths of those that bring them, thō they are themselves incapable by reason of their tender Age, of renouncing the Devil, and believing in God. They offer 'em to God, and no doubt he accepts 'em: Exactly after the same Copy writes our Church, and in most of the same words, who in her Catechize, in answer to that Question, Why are Infants baptized, when by reason of their tender Age they are not able to perform the same, viz. Faith and Repentance, before mention'd: Its added, Because they promise them both by their Sureties; which Promise when they come to Age, themselves are bound to perform, and this Covenant the Sureties solemnly make for 'em before they are baptiz'd, as may be seen in the Form thereof. After Baptism their main Duty was to be Witnesses, and Admonishers to the party Baptiz'd, jointly with their Parents to instruct them in the Nature of their Vow and Duty to God; and

this indeed follows from the Nature of the Contract it self, which being made by them for such as were under Age, they ought certainly to acquaint 'em with what they have done for 'em, when they were able to understand it, and are to be Witnesses to them as well as the Church of their Baptism. Thus St. Austin, 'Who-soever, whether they be Men or Women, have taken their Spiritual Children from the Font, (for they used to receive 'em thence as well as to bring 'em thither) let 'em know they are to remain Sureties for 'em. And again more plainly, 'Those which thou hast taken from Baptism, Teach and Chastise. And Wallafridus Strabo, who as Dr. Cave tells us, flourish'd in the Year 800 and odd. 'The Godfathers and Godmothers ought to acquaint those whom they have taken from Baptism, when they come to Age, what promises they have made for 'em, and that they are to endeavour not to live unworthy of the Salvation provided for 'em, but perform themselves what they promis'd by others. And thus the Ch. of England in the Exhortation to the Sureties at the end of the Office; where indeed both parts of their Duty is comprehended in a few words; the first by way of recapitulation, Forasmuch as this Child hath promis'd by you his Sureties to renounce the Devil and all his works, to believe in God, and to serve him; the second, whereof we are now discoursing, in the following words, as the consequence of the foregoing, Ye must remember that 'tis your parts and Duties to see that this Infant be taught, so soon as he shall be able to learn, what a solemn Vow, Promise and Profession he hath made by you. There they discharge the Office of Witnesses, as well as Instructors, as in what follows, more particularly of Monitors, Advisers, and Instructors, being To call upon them to hear Sermons, and to see that they be taught what they ought to know and believe to their Souls health, and that with Authority too, as St. Austin before, not only docete, but castigate.

This for the Institution, Ends and Offices of Godfathers and Godmothers. The first of which, that of being Sureties for the Parents now partly ceases, namely, as to their Apostatizing from the Faith; but as to what may be as dangerous in respect of the Child, still remains, to wit, their Apostatizing from a good Life, if ever they liv'd one; for either of which Reasons they may be careless in their Education, or at least may dye, and leave 'em *Infantes*, and in both cases, the Expediency of these Sureties is as great as ever, for necessary in themselves they are not thought, the Sacrament being essentially perfect without 'em. The other Reasons also still remain, Infants can't Contract for themselves, it must be done by others. Thus it was in the Jews Sacrament, the Parents cou'd not be both there, nor conveniently here, nor is it so fit to lay all the trust on them, for the Reasons just mention'd, tho none thinks their Obligation is made void by anothers being jointly bound with them.

Now if Godfathers were ever lawfull, or convenient, they must be so now: When there's as much danger of the Parents neglecting his Child as ever, and as much, if not more danger, from a bad life, as from a false belief; for which Reason our Ch. still continues 'em, which Custom, were it but simply indifferent, she has power to do, for if Laws can't be made about indifferent Matters, they can be made about none at all; and such, before they are determin'd are the Accidents and Circumstances of any Religious Duty. But this also carries a high convenience with it, as we have already shown, yet is not made by our Ch. essential to the Sacrament: it self, tho an essential term of Communion, and unless in extraordinary cases, not to be omitted by those who profess to be Members thereof, to whom at least all her Injunctions are Obligatory, or else why do they live in it? All that are lawfull, as we think this is, and know of none that is not. Accordingly to the Question, we think that Ch. of England man does very ill, who neglects to make use of Sureties, since command'd, and lawfully command'd both by the Authority of Ch. and State, as he himself must also believe, if he's really and cordially what he professes. But the Sunday is now past, and its too late for him to ask the Question, however he ought to repent his Fault now, and mend it hereafter, if he has any other such occasion.

As to those two common Objections against this ancient and laudable Custom, mention'd in the Question, they come now to be consider'd, That these Sureties are unnecessary, and that they promise what is impossible to perform. To the first, an answer may be easily gather'd from what has bin already said, that they are not absolutely necessary as to the Essential Complexion of the Sacrament,

is granted, and so is all but our Saviours very words, *I Baptize thee in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the H. Ghost.* You see the very Naming the Child there can't be essential, or in that sense necessary to Baptism, much less those Prayers which all Christians add at the same time, both which all Parties add to the Institution, as to the Circumstances thereof. Thus these Sureties are unnecessary, and therefore on extraordinary cases, danger of Death, &c. where private Baptism is allow'd, they are not requir'd, but as the Rubrick directs, *The Child is to be nam'd by any person that's present:* And in the Rubrick after the Baptism, when the Child is publicly brought to Church, it is said, *If the Minister finds that all things were done as they ought to be, then shall he not Christen the Child again, but receive him as one of the Flock of true Christian People.* Hence it is plain the Sacrament is already essentially perfect, and yet for the accidental perfection thereof Godfathers are afterward requir'd when the Child is brought to Church, as may be seen in the Office appointed for that purpose: And thus we think the *Querist* is also oblig'd to do in the present Case; for necessary, they are to the accidental perfection of the Sacrament, necessary *pro hic & nunc*, now they are lawfully requir'd by lawful authority without any just impediment. For the 2d. Objection, 'That the Sureties are bound there to promise more than they are able to perform, some say, even for themselves: but all that thus object for the Children. Some we have heard say, the Sureties promise more than they can do for themselves, to renounce the Devil and all his works, to believe in God, and keep his Commandments. But if they are not able to do it, are they not able to resolve to do it, or rather, are they not able both to resolve it, and do it by the Grace of God, who, as our Ch. tells us in one of her Collects, must both put into our Mind good desires, and also give us Grace to perform the same: But how can they promise for the Children, that they shall do this? Let's first ask 'em how the Children shall promise it, unless some do it for 'em? To whom therefore, as St. Austin says, 'The Ch. lends the Feet of others that they may come, the Heart of others, that they may believe, and the Tongue of others, that they may promise or Covenant. But further, they are no more oblig'd hereby, than a Guardian is, that his Minor shall perform Contracts, made for him during his Minority when he comes of Age, that is, he is to make him acquainted with those Contracts, and press him to perform 'em, which if he does not, 'tis his own fault, not the Guardians, who must leave him to the Law, either to make him do it, or punish him for the Breach of 'em, since his Minority when they were made, won't excuse his performance, especially if for his Benefit. The Case is so exactly the same here, that the parallel hardly need be drawn out. The Sureties are, when the Child comes of Age, to acquaint him what they have undertaken for him, and that he is now to take it upon himself, as he does in his Catechism and Confirmation; they are to press him earnestly to his duty, and use all means they can to make him practise it; and if they have done this, they have discharg'd their Obligation, and no more than this is meant by what they promise in his Name. All which, tho' it seem to us very clear from the Explanation thereof already made, yet we desire not any to believe us gratis, or without proving all we say from our Churches own unbought Declarations: She has certainly the Liberty to explain her own meaning, and she tells us the Duty of these Sureties in that Exhortation at the end of the Office already mention'd; and what 'tis is also already explain'd, 'To see the Infant be taught, so soon as he comes of Age, what a solemn vow, promise and Profession he hath made by them: To call upon them to hear Sermons; to provide that he may learn the Creed, &c. and all other things which a Christian ought to know and believe to his Souls health. — What are those *all other things*, but (as is afterwards mention'd) the further Instruction in the Ch. Catechism, which contains all things necessary to Salvation, nay, has more than those of the Ancient Churches had. But the next thing in the Exhortation presses hardest: They are to take care, 'That the Child be virtuously brought up to lead a Christian Life; how can they do this? Why as is before explain'd, Being brought up to lead a Christian Life, is no more than being Educated in that manner, partly by teaching 'em the things foremention'd,

and by reminding 'em of their Vow, partly by reproving 'em if they do amiss, nay reproving their Parents, if by ill Example, or any other way they are wanting in their Duty to 'em, tho' if the Children are far remov'd in their Infancy, the Case is somewhat alter'd. All which you see are no such impossible things to discharge, but men excuse their own negligence and Laziness, and sometimes Perjury too by that pretence: For that few Godfathers any more than Parents truly perform their Office, is too sad a Truth to be either deny'd or defended, but that's still their own faults. For these Vows, these Promises, the Child is certainly bound when he comes of Age to take upon himself, and free his Surety, which if he does not, and the other has discharg'd his Duty, his Blood will be upon his own head, and the Sureties have nothing to answer for. Thus have we endeavour'd fairly to discuss this great Question, declaring plainly what we take to be the Sense of Antiquity, and the Ch. of England, as well as our own Judgments in this matter, without any reflections on those who are of another (we think mistaken) Opinion.

Quest. 2. *Whether the New Observer has not bin too severe upon the Author of the Present State of England?*

Ans. He can be no wise Man that will give Judgment decisive betwixt two parties that have neither given him a Commission so to do, nor want his Arbitration. 'Tis a very ridiculous sort of Folly, where by an over officious serving our Friend, we make him a Debtor to us whether he will or no, and force such a Complement upon him as necessarily implies that he was not able to right himself. The utmost that Modesty will permit us to speak of it, is this, That the New Observer has given his Reasons for what he says, and 'tis expected, that the Author of that Book, or its Friends, shew the weakness of his Reasons, or own the Charge, without railing noise, or begging Questions. What one of that Authors Friends has alledg'd for the worth of the Book, viz. the luck of many Editions, is a very weak Argument, since Mother Shiptons Prophecies, Keynards Fox, and such like, bid much fairer for number of Impressions than that Book.

Questions sent us lately, which shall be all answer'd next Fryday, with several others, viz.

Quest. 1. *Of what Antiquity is Dancing upon the Rope, and what may be suppos'd to give the first rise to that Sport?*

Quest. 2. *What is the Reason why a Chequer is placed at Alehouse doors?*

Quest. 3. *Whether Dr. Chamberlains Present State of England be the most pernicious vile Book that ever appear'd in the World?*

Query 4. *What is your Opinion of that Famous passage in Josephus in the 4th. Ch. of the 18th. Book of his Antiquities that relates to Jesus Christ?*

Qu. 5. *Reading lately a Book entituled, The frauds of Romish Monks, wherein I find several ridiculous Follies: Pray give us your Thoughts upon that Book?*

Qu. 6. *Which was the ultimate Tule of the Ancients?*

We hope the Gentleman that sent the Letter concerning Josephus will find full Satisfaction in the Answer we shall give to it next Fryday.

AN ADVERTISEMENT to all our Querists.

WE having been importun'd by several of our Querists for more speedy Answers to their Questions than our two Weekly Papers can afford 'em, and several that live in the Countrey complaining they can never see the Answers given to their Questions in our twelve Numbers that are publish'd altogether, upon these Considerations we think fit to give Notice, that for the future we shall publish our single Mercuries four times a Week, and finish each Volume in that Method, that so our Querists may see all their Questions more speedily Answer'd, and at a cheaper Rate than formerly; so that now our Mercuries will be publish'd

Tuesdays and } as formerly.
Saturdays — }

And also on
Mondays and
Frydays.

We shall continue publishing our Supplements as formerly, and at the end of every five Volumes print an APPENDIX of a hundred and twenty sheets, which said Supplements and Appendix shall contain Answers to all those Questions and Occurrences which we have not room to insert in our four Weekly Mercuries. Continue sending in your Questions as formerly to Smiths Coffee-house in Stocks-market, or to the Rotterdam Coffee-house in Finch-lane, and when we have receiv'd Questions enough (with what we have already by us) to fill up the said Appendix, we shall give publick Notice thereof.

L O N D O N, Printed for John Dunton at the Raven in the Poultry. 1692.