

The Athenian Mercury.

Quest. 1. **T**Here are a Knot of Apprentices dwelling nigh each other, who are all concern'd in keeping Company with a Servant Maid, of no good Reputation, who lives near 'em, and sometimes stay with her all Night, and spend Money on Treats for her; which if there's not a stop soon put to't, may prove their Ruine. I having come to the Knowledge of this Intrigue unknown to them, desire your advice whether I ought to make it known to their Masters, or Conceal it because it may occasion much trouble, or what's the best Method I can take to oblige 'em to leave these Irregular Courses?

Ans. We think it won't be prudent to acquaint their Masters with't, before you have try'd all other handsome ways to reclaim 'em. If you please you may send each of 'em one of these Mercuries, by which they'll find the thing has taken Air, and unless they reform, is like to grow much more publick — In the mean while, we think it necessary here, to represent to 'em (and all others concern'd in like manner, tho' indeed none knows but it may be himself,) the scandal and danger of these Courses, which indeed are so plain that there needs not much Declamation. If they find even the shame so uneasy a thing to be born, and those concern'd can hardly read this without a blush, how much heavier must the Sin be, even supposing they live to repent of it, much more if they never do so? They can't but know well enough that they are treading the same Path, which has led so many in their Circumstances into inevitable Ruine, both of Fame, Estate, Body, and 'tis to be fear'd Soul and all. They can't be Ignorant, how lively one who had been but too well acquainted with matters of that Nature describes that sort of People; "A Whorish Woman is a deep Ditch, the abhorr'd of the Lord shall fall into her — and that her House is the way to Hell, going down to the Chambers of Death. — And that tho' they may please themselves, as one does there, who has none of the best Characters (simple and void of understanding) that stolln Waters are sweet, and Bread eaten in secret is pleasant, yet what follows will miserably imbitter it all — "He knoweth not that the Dead are there, and that her guests are in the Depths of Hell. They'd do well, soberly and frequently to consider this advice, which they can't think is suggested by Interest or Prejudice, since we know not so much as one of their Names, and unless it be their own faults, never shall — We desire 'em often to read the seventh Chapter of the Proverbs and on the whole only to act like rational Creatures, and to consider the certain and unavoidable consequences of their persisting in such ill-courses; which if they do, we hope they'll quickly come to a better mind, and we shou'd

think our selves very happy, if these Papers shou'd be any occasion on't: This for the Persons concern'd — for the Gentleman who proposes the charitable Question, if this works any thing on the Young Men, he has done his Duty, and perhaps sav'd 'em from Ruine — If it fails, and they are still incorrigible, 'twill be then time enough to acquaint their Masters with it — tho' even then, we think it were more Prudent as well as Kind, first to let their Parents or Friends know it, if there's any convenience of doing it.

Quest. 2. Being in Company the other Night, among other Discourse, one of the Company said a man might be too Godly, and quoted that Text for it, Eccl. 7. 16. "Be not Righteous overmuch. Pray give me the true Interpretation of these Words, and how we ought to understand 'em.

Ans. This is an old Objection of the Atheists, which has been often enough answer'd, tho' they wou'd fain pass for such Monstrous Wits, that we need not wonder they have such bad Memories. It's generally thought that these Words are only an Objection of the Ill-man, or rather an Irony of the Preachers, putting those Words into his Mouth, and then the Case is clear without any further trouble; and the Atheist wou'd be hard put to it to prove the contrary. However, supposing Solomon here speaks in earnest, the Words wou'd be still far enough from encouraging Sin, or discouraging Heroick Piety, or the heights of Virtue, "All things says the Preacher, v. 15. "I have seen in the days of my Vanity — a just man that perisheth in his Righteousness and a Wicked man that longeth his Life in his Wickedness — then v. 16. Be not Righteous overmuch neither make thy self over wise, "why should'st thou destroy thy self? It's possible the Preacher here advises his Young Man, to the same Instance of Prudence that a Greater and Wiser than he, did his Disciples, "Not to cast Pearls before Swine, lest they shou'd trample 'em under Foot, and turn again and rent them. Not to make themselves Ridiculous and Obnoxious by an open fruitless Opposition to the current of Injustice or Wickedness, lest they shou'd be overborn by it, and only rashly lose their Lives, when God did not require it at their Hands, not unlike those which Church-History tells us of, who wou'd run to the Tormentors and own themselves Christians on purpose to be made Martyrs till they were at last by a particular Canon divested of that Honour. But whether this be the Sense here or no, we are sure the Sense of what immediately follows is clear enough, v. 17. which is exactly oppos'd to that before. "Be not overmuch wicked, (Greek — very Wicked) neither be thou foolish? why shou'dst thou die before thy time — Debauchery and

and *Vice* then, it seems, as well as now, being the means by which extravagant Young Men oftentimes shorten'd their Days. Nay it's remarkable that there's a particular reference, or N. B. in the verse that follows, v. 18. — "It is good that thou take hold of this, (that thou well and seriously weigh and observe this maxime foremention'd — Be not overmuch Wicked, &c.) "Yea also from this withdraw "not thy hand (be always conversant and "employ'd about it, or have it always before "thee.) For he that feareth God shall come "forth of them all — either from Wickedness, or "Adversity before mention'd — the former "here, the latter, either here, or hereafter.

Quest. 3. 'Tis generally said that the Mother of our Saviour was a Virgin to her Death — Pray let me know what Text or other Arguments there are to ground that belief on, since the contrary seems to be asserted in Holy Scripture, viz. that she had several Children. For 'tis said, St. Mat. i. 24, 25. "Then Joseph her Husband "took unto him Mary his Wife, and knew her "not until she brought forth her first-born Son, and St. Mat. 13. 55, 56. "Is not his Mother Mary, and his Brethren James and Joses and Simon and Judas, and his Sisters are they not all "with us?

Ans. We have no Ambition to have Heresie thrown in our Teeth, or some angry Antiquary fall upon us with the terrible Name of Antidicomarianites, with which they formerly maul'd such as deny'd the perpetual Virginity. We confess Universal Tradition, in so indifferent a Point, weighs very much with us in this matter, and this carries it clearly, that she dy'd a Virgin — Tho' had not that so positively attested it, the places in Scripture wou'd have sway'd very much for the contrary Opinion, whereas now we are forc'd to strain for an agreeable Interpretation. The Arguments from Scripture for her perpetual Virginity are nothing but flourish — nor have we ever met with any of greater force than that of Ezekiel's Gate, thro' which the Lord God was only to enter. Those against it are thus usually answer'd. The "Until, in the first of St. Mat. is commonly taken in the Scripture for an interminable time, or such as has only an internal, not an external Period. "Thou shalt not "escape until thou hast paid the uttermost "Farthing — thou shalt never escape. So Psalm 71. 16. Forsake me not, &c. Until I have shew'd thy strength to this Generation, &c. that is, to be sure, never forsake me, and in a Case near a-kin to this, in the 2 Sam. 6. last. Michal the Daughter of Saul had no Child until the Day of her Death; First-born is commonly taken exclusively of any others pass't, not inclusively of any other to come. And Brethren is a word often used for Kinsfolks among the Jews — and in these Words consists most of the difficulty of this Question.

Quest. 4. Whether Preaching were not wholly vain, if the Doctrine of absolute Election and Reprobation were true?

Ans. We have more than once already express'd our Judgment in this matter, and own'd that we are for the middle way, wherein we think Justice is done both to the Grace of God, and Reason of Man; accordingly here if by ab-

solute Election and Reprobation, the Querist supposes in both Cases, such a Positive, Unconditional, irresistible Decree of the Almighty that let one Man do whatever Ill, or neglect whatever Good, he shall yet be sav'd, another do whatever good he can, or abstain from whatever ill, he shall be damn'd; this we think wou'd not only make Preaching Vain, but Obedience too, for neither is the Nature of Man so generous, that he's likely to do good, if no good came of it, nor cou'd he indeed possibly perform any Moral Action, and therefore any that's either good or bad, if under any such an irresistible Necessity of doing it — The Necessity which is in God towards Good, being not External, but proceeding from his own Nature, which it's true may consist with Spontaneity, but so cannot any External Coactive Necessity, which is here suppos'd.

Quest. 5. For what purpose were the Stars Created, the Light they give, at best being very small and inconsiderable, and that often intercepted by Clouds, &c. And whether they influence Humane Bodies, and consequently humane Affairs, and how far, and for what purpose serves that vast Space in the Heavens that seems to be between every Star?

Ans. We'll begin with the Question in the middle — whether the Stars influence Humane Bodies, and consequently Humane Affairs, and how far? That the Stars have some real influence on humane Bodies, we are sure from experience, because they have all Light and some of 'em heat. And 'tis probable at least from Scripture, which tells us of the sweet influences of the Pleiades, tho' we confess 'tis but guess't what that is which we render by this Greek Word: But that they have any occult influence, such as Astrologers fancy, on the Bodies and very Minds of Men, much less any such as forces 'em to good or bad Actions, we can't believe, having never seen any solid Reason for't, and what is produc'd from experience being here of little value, because other Instances may be brought, which diametrically contradict it. — But of the Vanity of this, and that foolish Science which is built upon it, we have largely discours'd in former Papers.

However they were created, as well as those Heavens where they are, to declare the Glory of God, and shew forth his Infinite Power, in making so many vast beautiful Bodies. To supply the absence of the Sun and Moon by their united Beams, at least, better than no Light at all. To direct the Traveller both by Sea and Land, the little Pole-star being of almost Infinite use in things of that Nature. For the Perfection and Beauty of the Creation, the Stars adorning the Expanse as Flowers do a Meddow, and perhaps for Worlds or Receptacles for other unknown Creatures of a distinct Species from Man; or for other uses, either to be found out while our world is in its present State, or at least when in a Better. For the vast Space in the Heavens, it do's not so much as seem to be between every Star, for some, as those of the Galaxy, and the Nebulous Constellations seem to the naked Eye, to be close together. But where there appear larger spaces, 'tis for the motion of the Planets Comets, &c. or to let us see others between them.