

# The Athenian Mercury:

Tuesday, July 12. 1692.

Quest. 1. **C**an you tell us what good was ever yet done by your Athenian Mercury?

*Ans.* It's a little hard to have such a Question put upon us, for 'tis no easie matter for an Author to make a just Censure of his own writings, most men being partial in their own Cause, tho' perhaps there may be some few who think as meanly of their own performances as any of their Enemies. However, we must not be silent here, lest it shou'd be taken *pro confesso*, that we have done no good at all by our Scribbling above this Twelve month. Not therefore to insist on the mighty benefits, which (if they are not very ungrateful) the Stationers, Printers, Hawkers, Coffee-houses, &c. (very profitable Members of the Commonwealth) must own they have receiv'd by our Mercury, nor to boast of its merits in helping to carry on the War against France, by advancing the Royal Revenue some thousands per An. (pence we mean) by the Penny Post, (a finer and honestest Project than all the French Horseleaches ever yet thought of for raising money.) And lastly, to say nothing how helpful we have been to the Pastry-Cooks, &c. we think we may in earnest, and without vanity pretend that our Paper has been of some real use both to the publick, and in many particular cases of high moment: For the first, none can deny but we have rais'd a kind of Learned Ferment in the Nation, the Body of which was almost grown dead and vapid as to any taste of such things, by the hurries and distractions of the Last Reign, and the end of King Charles the 2ds, and the continual Wars of the present: But since we have set the World a talking, they have fallen a writing too, and many a good piece has bin publish'd, which otherwise probaby had hardly ever seen the Light. And whence came all the accounts of Foreign Books, those Acts upon Acts, and Journals after Journals which we now see every day here in England? had they not notoriously the first hint from us? and if we had not broke the Ice, and crackt the Egg, none else had e're bin like to have done it. Then for that great and glorious Project, the Reformation of manners, if the Stream of Vice yet runs so impetuously, that it still overbears all opposition, and many who are set to guard the Dams, are the most forward to pierce 'em; if the Inferiour Officers will be perjur'd, and resolve not to perform their Duties, we however have the satisfaction of having done ours, as far as cou'd be expected from Persons in our Stations; nor shall we yet despair to see some effects thereof, nor want some such Instances already as make us not repent our Labour, being still resolv'd to prosecute the same design in a more pleasing dress, as the World may quickly see. Then for particular persons, tho' 'tis impossible to satisfie all, nor were we ever so vain to hope it, yet we find we have done so to a great many, in cases of the highest Concern, and which may have a much larger influence by being thus publick. And for the rest, had we only innocently diverted the World, 'twou'd be no unacceptable piece of Service both to them and the publick, since it finds 'em Employment, some perhaps by commending, others by railing at us, others by showing their parts in talking better things extempore on our Questions than we cou'd write, but all in keeping 'em either from Idleness, or doing what might be worse than nothing.

Quest. 2. I am a Trader in the World, yet tho' I sell my Goods, I would willingly act like an honest man as to my Soul; supposing therefore our Commodities to be capable of a threefold price conscionably stated with a gradual advance: I demand 1st. May I ask beyond the highest price, thereby to obtain it, because people commonly expect a thing for less than I ask at first; or granting this Lawful, suppose I meet with a Chapman both soft and ignorant, and I also not knowing him to be such, ask him beyond my highest price, and gain it, is this

Extortion? if so, how shou'd I mend it at present, and prevent the like for the future?

*Ans.* If there be three Prizes of the same Goods, supposing you do not always or often obtain the highest Price for it, you may yet have sufficient gain in the sale thereof: For which reason we think it both most safe and most honest never to ask beyond the highest, tho' some Casuists are of Opinion, that in some cases this may be lawfull, as supposing the Buyer of such an extravagant humour, that he'll like nothing, tho' never so good, unless you put a high price upon it. But then they add, that if you gain your price, you are to give him back the overplus, it being certainly a Sin to take more for any thing than the utmost value.

Quest. 3. Am I oblig'd when demanded to tell my lowest price, as when my Chapman says, What is your lowest price, or you will not sell it? Must I answer positively, or are such Equivocations and mental reservations lawfull as are generally used; as supposing my lowest price, which rather than turn away a Customer I would take, shou'd be 7 d. I tell him, being positively demanded as before, he shall have it for 8 d. or 9 d. or perhaps with a mental reservation, that 8 d. is my lowest price, meaning that I will yet make him?

*Ans.* Equivocations and mental reservations are both absolutely unlawful, as our Protestant Divines universally hold. However, we think there's a wide difference between those Jesuitical tricks, which wou'd destroy all Truth, and answering directly and openly to every Question of whatever Nature that is put unto you, when in many cases shou'd you either do so, or say nothing at all, the worst wou'd be taken for granted. In the present difficulty, tho' your Chapman demands positively the lowest price you can sell your Goods for, you are by no Law, nor by common Equity oblig'd positively to answer him. You are not upon your Oath, nor are you bound to speak the whole Truth, tho' you must the Truth and nothing but the Truth: — Its therefore an easie matter to shift the answer, and yet so as for the most part to give satisfaction; you may justly and truly say 'tis worth more than he bids for it, if capable of different prizes, and he bids but the very lowest, or what's indifferent; nay, we think you may say he shall have it for such a price above the lowest, which he may take for a positive answer to his Question, tho' it be but an indirect one, which we think is no Equivocation, as we are sure 'tis no Falsity or Injustice, tho' a deceit it is, but we think an innocent one, and such 'tis certain there may be.

Quest. 4. Is not that answer which I think is positive, that is commonly given by the Seller to the Chapman when he would raise the Customer to a higher price, a downright Lye, namely, when I am bid a Price that I can take, to get more it is commonly said, I can't take it, or Indeed I can't take it: If 'tis a Fault, where is the remedy, and the honestest way to advance the Price, since a Trader can't live always by a low, or the lowest price?

*Ans.* There's no question to be made, but when a Man says positively he can't take a price which yet he can take, that 'tis a Lye. As for the Remedy, we think it better to say he will not than he cannot take such a price, which to be sure is no Lye, if he then really speaks according to his present Intentions, tho' he may afterwards see just Cause without any Lye, to alter 'em, there being some circumstances granted and presupposed of all sides in every such resolution and promise, which may either confirm or alter it, and which yet are far from any Equivocation, or secret reservation, of which more in the next Question.

Quest. 5. Suppose I have set my Chapman the lowest price I am willing to take, and tell him positively I will take no less, yet after all, supposing the quantity and Chapman to be considerable, he proffers me within a small matter of what I demand

demand, and will not give any more: May not I without sin comply with his Demands, rather than lose the Sale of the Goods now present, or my Chapman's Custom for the future?

Ans. As before, we don't doubt but 'tis Lawful for any Man to recede from his Resolution, if he sees Reason to do so, which he might not see or consider, when he made such a Resolution: Now 'tis certain that the Present Sale is sometimes a very great Advantage, and that as well as a future Custom may so far preponderate, as not only to make it Prudent to Sell at the lowest Price, but even in some Cases at less than it Cost you.

Quest. 6. Supposing I have by me a Parcel of Goods, part whereof is good and part bad, both whereof cost the same Price, may not I lawfully mix 'em, it being not in my way to get a Price answerable for the good, that I might be a saver by the rest?

Ans. There's scarce any doubt to be made that 'tis lawful to mix the good and the bad, so as to put 'em both off at a reasonable Rate — but then not to sell them at as high a Rate as if they were all good, tho' you your self bought 'em so, since one Man's Cheating you can be no Excuse for your Cheating another.

Quest. 7. If I cannot get a reasonable Price for my Goods, to afford Weight and Measure, may I rather than lose my Customer agree with him for such a Quantity of Goods, and make him believe he has his Due, which may be so indeed according to his Price, yet he has not what he supposes himself to have? be it understood likewise that I can afford him my Goods as Cheap as any body else, only some Peeples Humour is to be thought Hard Buyers and Good Husbands?

Ans. There is we confess some difficulty in this Case — For, of one side the very Question supposes that no real Injustice be done to the Chapman, but that he has the worth of his Money, and buys as Cheap as he can any where else: But yet on the other side, here's a False Weight and a False Balance, here seems to be a plain Cheat in Trading; and besides, the very probable Consequences of such a Practice are so bad, that we think it ought not to be done: For Example, any Trader that Buys a Parcel of Goods for so much, or such a quantity, must sell 'em for so much again, either by Wholesale or Retail; if the first, he innocently Cheats another, and you must bear the Guilt on't; if the second, he's likely to find out the Cheat, and then your Credit is for ever lost with him, and 'tis ten to one he never deals with you more. But supposing your Customer no Trader, he may yet take a Fancy to try your Goods by other Weights or Measures, by which means if yours come not up to the Standard, you are certainly disgrac'd, and you lose both your Customer, his Friendship, and your own Honour.

Quest. 8. Your Opinion of the Makers of such Weights and Measures, knowing the Design, and whether they are not Partners in the Fact?

Ans. We suppose by Makers of such Weights and Measures, the Querist means those who make the very fraudulent Weights and Measures, (as Pound Weights, Yards, &c.) by which the Sale is to be made, not those who apply such Measures to the Goods, Pack 'em up, or such like: Accordingly we Answer, that we think 'em rather more Criminal than the other, because there are more ill Consequences plainly in View on such a Practice; for they not only are accessory to those before mentioned, where there is such an honest Intention, but to all those Cheats which may voluntarily be committed by such false Weights and Measures.

Quest. 9. Whether Mr. John Smith's little Book, (Printed 1686.) of the Inequality of Natural time, and his Table of Equations in it, do give us a satisfactory Account of the Variation of our Pendulum Clocks from a Sun-Dial? and whether the said Book and Table be not made to excuse the Imperfection of our Clocks? or whether a Clock would be less perfect, if it alwayes went true with a good Sun-Dial?

Ans. It would be more perfect, for a good Sun-Dial is a perfect thing. The Book is a good Essay of the way to adjust Watches, and Clocks, and to discover the Imperfections of both: But the Equation is now exactly done to a Minute for every Day, by a Table in Parker's Almanack, which never was in any Almanack

before, and which has the Approbation of Mr. Flamsted, and other excellent Astronomers, which Almanack supercedes all that has yet been wrote of this Subject.

Quest. 10. Pray your meaning of that Text, Pay Tribute to whom Tribute is due, &c. because your Answer about Customs was not clear?

Ans. What is morally and positively evil every Man knows, and without Repentance there can be no Pardon of Sin against God, altho' the Offence, as against Man, extends no farther than the Damnation that the Law appoints.

Quest. 11. Why do the Jacobites dislike your Answer last Saturday?

Ans. Because they please themselves with the wrong sense they impose upon our first Answer unto the Question about A private Gentleman despised by his Relations and Friends, because he was in a low Condition, and kept or supported by the Charity of a Friend he did not expect it from. They will wrest this Question from a private Gentleman's Condition, to the most Publick and Culminant: 'Tis true, it is but what they in Concert with their ROMAN BRETHREN do by the News, Jacobin it, that is, give it a false turn. But if they will needs have it a Publick Case, tho' no Circumstances concur thereunto, then three apparent Absolute Falsities are in the Question, Viz. So despised, so supported by a real Friend, and one that it could not be expected from: We might fling down the Glove to the most cunning, or the wickedest of that sort of Men, to try to make it true and hang together: They might as well instance in the Fallen Angels, as in the French King's being indued with pure Friendship, they both acting from the same Principle of Generosity.

THE COMPLEAT LIBRARY for July is now in the Press, which (does now, and shall for the future) consist chiefly of Books, and the News of Learning, that so no Book of Value, printed either in England or in the Forreign Journals may escape our Notice. Printed for John Dunton at the Raven in the Poultry, of whom is to be had The Compleat Library for May and June.

### Advertisements.

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