

# The Athenian Mercury:

Saturday, July 11. 1691.

Quest. 1. **B**Y what way may those who read much best preserve their Eye-sight?

*Ans.* There are a hundred Medicines to be used which every Old Woman will tell you. For preventive Remedies, Study not much by Candle-light, nor drink often of strong Liquors, unless you are of his mind who said — Farewell dear Eyes! when his Physicians told him, if he did not forbear Wine he'd certainly lose 'em. Washing 'em every Morning with a good Spring-water is a cheap and excellent Remedy for 'em when ill-affected. The Philosophical Transactions, Vol. 4. p. 1157. tell us, that Verjuice is a Remedy for sore Eyes: But the prettiest way of Cure is that they give us Vol. 3. p. 727. which take in their own Words: "A Gentleman of sixty Years of Age, by much Reading had so extremely impair'd his Sight that he cou'd now Read no longer, nor cou'd any sort of Spectacles afford him any relief, 'till at length he recover'd the Use of his Eyes by this Method: He took Spectacles with the largest Circles next the Semicircles on the over-part, on both sides he cut the Bone, then taking out the Glasses, he put black Spanish-leather Taperwise into the empty Circles, which widened enough, together with the increasing wideness of the Leather, took in his whole Eye at the greater end, the less being only big enough to put in the top of his little Finger, and through the lesser End he thus read the smallest Characters like large Print. This may also be done with Paper, blackt in the inside with somewhat that does not shine — Thus far they — for the Success of the Experiment, we have try'd it our selves, and find it answers Expectation, as we doubt not will any one else, who shall have Occasion to make use on't, we hope without any Offence to the Spectacle-makers.

Quest. 2. Whether the taking Tobacco does a Man good or hurt?

*Ans.* Mr. Osborn in his Famous Advice to his Son, made up, as all know, only of his own Experiences, tells him, that he had himself taken it from sixteen to sixty, without ever finding it did him one Farthings-worth either of good or hurt — And the same we are apt to believe many more might say if they'd be but ingenious. However, its certain enough that in this Case as well as all other, circumstances extremely alter the thing: What's one Man's Meat and Physick too is anothers Poyson — all grant that Tobacco may be of excellent Use to your Moist and Phlegmatick Constitutions, by drying up or draining off what wou'd else offend Nature — But on the other side, 'tis almost as much Poyson to a dry and chollerick Person, as the Oyl of it is to a Kitten, when dropt upon its Tongue, or convey'd into its Flesh; rendring him yet more adust and chollerick, and even endangering the throwing him into a Frenzy, especially if taken in any great Quantity; for a little Poyson can do but a little Mischief. And indeed 'tis the Quantity after all that may seem to denominate it either profitable or hurtful. We have known some such Gluttons at it, as to smoke upwards of thirty Pipes a day; and others so bewitcht with it, that they can do almost nothing else. These extremes it was, we may believe, which brought all the Wits of the Age against it, when it first obtain'd in England, if we mayn't rather be tempted to suspect it was King James the First's Royal Pen being engag'd in the Cause, and proclaiming open War against it, which made all the other Writers draw on the same side; (tho' cou'd that Prince have known what vast Revenues this Plant wou'd in a few Ages have brought to the Crown, he cou'd scarce have had the Heart to be so unmerciful against it.) Hence proceeded Jo. Sylvester's Volley of Shot thunder'd from Mount Helicon, as well as all the little Potgun-Scribbles which we find in that Age against poor Tobacco. Nor has the World quite done with it yet — Meibomius in a Treatise of his — De Cerevisiis, & Ebriamini-bus aliis, Printed at Helmstadt, 1668. mentions this a-

mong other Narcotick Fumes, and is withall very witty upon't, applying thereunto what Virgil says of Cacus —

*Faucibus ingentem fumum, mirabile dictu!  
Evomit, involvique domum caliquie cœcâ  
Prospexit eripiens Oculis, glomeratque sub auras  
Fumiferam Noctem, commistis igne Tenebris.*

Which if you are disposed to be Merry, take thus, (or somewhat like 'em) in pure Sternhold.

Forth from his Jaws  
Vast Smoak he draws,  
O strange and wondrous Sight!  
He draws and spews,  
And fills the House  
With mingled Fire and Night.

But notwithstanding all this, and that no Crown'd-head in Christendom did ever yet smoke, that came to our knowledge, the Porters in London, and the Good-women and Children in the West are not like to take one Pipe less than they did before, — and so we leave 'em without any further Disturbance at their unenvy'd Pleasure.

Quest. 3. Which is the best Poem that ever was made and who in your Opinion, deserves the Title of the best Poet that ever was?

*Ans.* The best Poem that ever was made, is the Universe, and he who made that, the first and best Poet. But for artificial Poems, not to meddle with the Scriptures, a great Part whereof, as part of Job, several of the Psalms, the Canticles, Isaiah, Lamentations, &c. is undoubtedly the best and noblest Poetry in the World. It is Virgil's Æneids, which in our Opinion, consonant to that of the greatest Criticks in all Ages, carries the Laurel from any humane Composition that was ever yet extant; both for the Compleatness of the Work, the Curiosity of the Fable, the fine ordering of the Nexus, the Justness of Thought, Greatness of Spirit, Dignity of Expression, and Purity of the Language, Tully himself scarce writing chaster Latin than Virgil did. Add to this, the excellent Descriptions, advantageous and proper Digressions, lovely Passions, neat Praises, (the by far most difficult part of Poetry, and which he so admirably manag'd towards Augustus his Family) take all this together, and nothing that's merely humane must pretend to come near this incomparable piece, as we doubt not will be granted by all the Impartial World, as long as that and this Poem shall last, for they are in all probability of an equal date. Thus an Heroick Poem being the height of Poetry, and this of all Heroicks, this being grantedly the best Poem, Virgil must be the best Poet. — Not that we can think him so excellent in his Eglogues, the Greeks out-doing him in that easie and natural way of writing, he making his Shepherds by much too well bred and learned; whereas Theocritus, and some other of the Grecians, shew 'em just as they really were, or might be suppos'd to be. Homer was a great man, as we have formerly discours'd, and that which he's commonly blam'd for, his long Bedrolls of Names and Descriptions of Places, is perhaps if duely consider'd, one of his greatest Beauty's. Sappho has an inimitable softness which melts the Soul at the very hearing the sound of her words in those few precious Fragments she has left us; nor did ever any come so near her since as Mrs. Behn. Callimachus and other of the middle-siz'd Poets, have nothing surprizing in 'em. Anacreon is extreme pretty, Pindar incomparable. For the rest of the Latin ones, Ovid was the wittiest, Horace the genteelst, Catullus the most waggish, Petronius the lewdest, Juvenal the angriest; but one of the honestest Martial, fit to be read by School-boys: — Statius, a very Tall fellow, and Lucan a very humble one. We had almost forgot the Dramaticks. —

Most



Most of the *Greek* Comicks are Stuff, but little of their Tragedy but what's excellent, neither of which we think brought to their height under the *Romans*, tho' *Plautus* wrote *juvily*, *Terence* neatly, — and *Seneca* has very fine thoughts. But since we can't go through all the World, let's look home a little. *Grandfire* *Chaucer*, in spite of the Age, was a man of as much wit, fence and honesty as any that have writ after him. Father *Ben* was excellent at *Humour*, *Shakespeare* deserves the Name of *sweetest*, which *Milton* gave him. — *Spencer* was a noble Poet, his *Fairy-Queen* an excellent piece of Morality, Policy, History. *Davenant* had a great Genius. Too much can't be said of Mr. *Cowley*. *Milton's Paradise lost*, and some other Poems of his will never be equal'd. *Waller* is the most correct Poet we have. For those who are yet living, we have nothing to say to 'em: Death shall excuse Mr. *Saffold*, and dullness the Author of the *Lampoon* on the *Athenian Mercury*.

Quest. 4. *Why are Angels painted in Petticoats?*

Ans. 'Twas the ancient Custom of the *Jews*, and the Eastern Parts of the World to wear long Garments; and 'tis not improbably suppos'd, that the Angels appearing mostly among the *Jews*, appear'd in Jewish Apparel; Nor is there any place which mentions the Appearance of Angels, where the Description contradicts such Habits — The Art of Painting is very Ancient, and the first Masters painting 'em humane, and in long Garments, their Schollars have ever since imitated them.

Quest. 5. *Whether the Grand Devil be a Corporal Substance, and if so, of what Colour?*

Ans. Angels, Souls and Spirits are Immaterial Beings, not clogg'd with, or confin'd to Matter and Form, therefore without Colour, for --- Colour is an Accident, and can't be independant of Substance. The Devil may appear by assuming Matter to act in, sometimes in one form, sometimes in another; and at such times some Colour is to be seen, but this assumed Matter and Colour, however diversify'd, is not the Devil, for the Devil can't be seen no more than a Thought, or ones Mind, which are Objects more inconsistent with Visibilty than an Object of Smelling is with Audibilty.

Quest. 6. *Whether were those Devils drown'd with the Swine, that ran violently down a steep place into the Sea?*

Ans. The Occasion of this Query might possibly be from the Story of the Priest, who Preaching upon that Text, declar'd he knew no means how the Poor Devils could avoid the same Fate as the Swine underwent, being not only under Water, but also Imprison'd in the Swine; but the real Solution is parallel to that of the Preceding Question. Drowning or Suffocation is an Act of Violence upon the respiring Organs, but the Devil has no Throat, Lungs, &c. because immaterial, therefore not to be drown'd; 'tis all one to him whether he is in the Bowels of the Earth, the Air, Fire or Water; he is equally proof against those Effects that all of 'em have upon Material Beings.

Quest. 7. *Whether there be any such thing as a Chameleon, and whether the Properties reported thereof are true, that it changes into all Colours, and lives upon Air?*

Ans. That there is such a thing, we learn both in ancient and modern Histories of Animals. The famous *Bochart* has a very learned Dissertation concerning its Nature and Properties, and a late Traveller gives us their Figure, and many pretty Experiments concerning 'em, they being of the Lizard-kind, and generally found about the Walls, and among the ruins of old Houses: The same Author confirms the changeableness of their Colours. — But as for their living upon the Air, tho' 'tis a pretty fancy, and does well enough in Poety, yet in reality it does so as much as the Mans Horse did, who just as he had brought him to't, dy'd. In short, they have been dissected, and Flies found in their Bodies, as well as proper Organs for digestion, &c. which is an evident argument they live not upon nothing, since neither can we suppose those Flies which are found there, wou'd creep into their Bellies of their own accord, nor are we to believe that Nature made any thing, any of those Organs before mentioned in vain.

Quest. 8. *Is the Story of the Tarantula, &c. real, or only a Fable?*

Ans. We having so many Instances both of that Creature, and the Effects its Biting produces, and ev'n a form'd History of the Animal and of the Disease,

printed at *Leyden*, in 12°. no longer since than 1668. we have all the reason in the World to believe it true, and none that we can conceive for which we should question it. The Account that Author gives of this strange merry *Spyder*, and its effects, take as follows: "The Disease occasion'd by its biting, he tells us, lurks "in the Blood generally two years before it arrives to "the height, only producing Fevers, &c. after this some "Symptoms there are common to all who are bitten, as "that they delight in Musick, and are strongly inclined "to Gesticulation, or a kind of dancing; others are proper "and peculiar to some only, as weeping, laughing, fancying themselves Kings, &c. which humour, whatever 'tis they first light upon, remains till their cure. Others "of 'em are strangely delighted and affected with different colours, Red, Blew, Green, or as it happens. This "for the Disease: as for the Cure, 'tis either common "to all, as Musick and Dancing, or else more peculiar "and proper, namely different Tunes to different Persons, "according to the different Symptoms of the Disease, "wherein it seems lies the great Art of curing 'em, since "what eases one, torments another.

He proceeds to the Cause and Manner both of Disease and Cure. The first he thus attempts to explain. "The Salivous Poyson of the Spider seizes principally on the "Nerves and Muscles, and in them the Spirits, and by "its periodical Heat stirs up and increases the heat of "the Heart, or corrupts the Bile in the Vessels, and when "the Poyson once affects the Spirits, it thereby causes an "unnatural motion at the beginning of the Nerves, which "by vellication of the Muscles, inclines the person to Gesticulation, or a sort of dancing.

"As for the manner of the Cure: — The Air moved "by the musical motion of the String or Instrument, moves "the next, and so onwards (as we see in the circular increasing motion of the Water when a Stone is cast into it) till the like be produced in the Spirits of the Body, to which the Air is impell'd. Now the commotion of the Passions depends on the Spirits, and the viscus humour of the Tarantule is a very capable subject of sound. Hence the next Air being mov'd by a musical Air suitable to the Patient, the lurking Poyson and Spirits of a man are put into a commotion, by which agitation the Nerves being vellicated, the Spirits vehemently stir'd, and Muscles mov'd, the dancing, or something like it, must of necessity ensue, by which the Cure is perform'd; for by vehement motion the Blood is heated, the Pores are opened, and the Poyson rarify'd, which can't be done by common Sudorificks, because the Medicines can't reach, or at least can't stir those little particles where the Poyson lies, as Dancing does. — Thus much we have thought fit to transcribe from this judicious Author on so curious a subject. Such as would be further satisfy'd concerning the strange efficacy of musick, let 'em consult the Learned *Vossius de Poematum Cantu*.

¶ The three weighty Questions concerning Love and Marriage, sent us by a young Lady, shall (they requiring a speedy Answer) be inserted in our Next Mercury.

\* \* The several Questions sent us concerning Marrying without Parents Consent, the Death-watch, &c. will be Answer'd at the End of our second Volume, and so will the Questions sent us by other Persons.

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