

ROMAN QUESTIONS.

Question 1. Wherefore do the Romans require a new-married woman to touch fire and water?

Solution. Is it not for one of these reasons; amongst elements and principles, one is masculine and the other feminine; — one (fire) hath in it the principles of motion, the other (water) hath the faculty of a subject and matter? Or is it because fire refines and water cleanseth, and a married wife ought to continue pure and chaste? Or is it because fire without moisture doth not nourish, but is adust, and water destitute of heat is barren and sluggish; so both the male and female apart are of no force, but a conjunction of both in marriage completes society? Or is the meaning that they must never forsake each other, but must communicate in every fortune, and although there be no goods, yet they may participate with each other in fire and water?

Question 2. Why do they light at nuptials five torches, neither more nor less, which they call waxen tapers?

Solution. Whether it be (as Varro saith) that the Praetors use three, but more are permitted to the Aediles, and married persons do light the fire at the Aediles' torches? Or is it that, having use of many numbers, the odd number was reckoned better and perfecter upon other accounts, and therefore more adapted to matrimony? For the even number admits of division, and the equal parts of opposition and repugnancy, whenas the odd cannot be

divided, but being divided into parts leaves always an inequality. The number five is most matrimonial of odd numbers, for three is the first odd and two is the first even, of which five is compounded, as of male and female.

Or rather, because light is a sign of generation, and it is natural to a woman, for the most part, to bring forth so far as five successively, and therefore they use five torches? Or is it because they suppose that married persons have occasion for five Gods, Nuptial Jupiter, Nuptial Juno, Venus, Suada, and above all the rest Diana, whom women invoke in their travail and child-bed sickness?

Question 3. What is the reason that, seeing there are so many of Diana's temples in Rome, the men refrain going into that only which stands in Patrician Street?

Solution. Is it upon the account of the fabulous story, that a certain man, ravishing a woman that was there worshipping the Goddess, was torn in pieces by dogs; and hence this superstitious practice arose, that men enter not in?

Question 4. Why do they in all other temples of Diana ordinarily nail up stags' horns against the wall, whenas in that of the Aventine they nail up the horns of cattle?

Solution. Was it to put them in mind of an old casualty? For it is said, that among the Sabines one Antro Coratius had a very comely cow, far excelling all others in handsomeness and largeness, and was told by a certain diviner that whoever should offer up that cow in sacrifice to Diana on the Aventine, his city was determined by fate to be the greatest in the world and have dominion over all Italy. This man came to Rome, with an intention to sacrifice his cow there; but a servant acquainted King Servius privately with this privacy, and the king making it known to Cornelius the priest, Cornelius strictly commands

Antro to wash in Tiber before he sacrificed, for the law requires men so to do who would sacrifice acceptably. Wherefore, whilst Antro went to wash, Servius took the opportunity to sacrifice the cow to the Goddess, and nailed up the horns to the wall in the temple. These things are storied by Juba and Varro, only Varro hath not described Antro by that name, neither doth he say that the Sabine was choused by Cornelius the priest, but by the sexton.

Question 5. Wherefore is it that those that are falsely reported to be dead in foreign countries, when they return, they receive not by the doors, but getting up to the roof of the house, they let them in that way?

Solution. Verily the account which Varro gives of this matter is altogether fabulous. For he saith, in the Sicilian war, when there was a great naval fight, and a very false report was rumored concerning many as if they were slain, all of them returning home in a little time died. But as one of them was going to enter in at his doors, they shut together against him of their own accord, neither could they be opened by any that attempted it. This man, falling in a sleep before the doors, saw an apparition in his sleep advising him to let himself down from the roof into the house, and doing so, he lived happily and became an old man; and hence the custom was confirmed to after ages. But consider if these things be not conformable to some usages of the Greeks. For they do not esteem those pure nor keep them company nor suffer them to approach their sacrifices, for whom any funeral was carried forth or sepulchre made as if they were dead; and they say that Aristinus, being one that was become an object of this sort of superstition, sent to Delphi to beg and beseech of the God a resolution of the anxieties and troubles which he had by reason of the custom then in force. Pythia answered thus:—

The sacred rites t' which child-bed folks conform,
See that thou do to blessed Gods perform.

Aristinus, well understanding the meaning of the oracle, puts himself into the women's hands, to be washed and wrapped in swaddling clouts, and sucks the breasts, in the same manner as when he was newly born; and thus all others do, and such are called Hysteropotmi (i.e. those for whom a funeral was made while living). But some say that these ceremonies were before Aristinus, and that the custom was ancient. Wherefore it is not to be wondered at, if the Romans, when once they suppose a man buried and to have his lot among the dead, do not think it lawful for him to go in at the door whereat they that are about to sacrifice do go out or those that have sacrificed do enter in, but bid them ascend aloft into the air, and thence descend into the open court of the house. For they constantly offer their sacrifices of purification in this open court.

Question 6. Wherefore do women salute their relations with their mouth?

Solution. What if it should be (as many suppose) that women were forbid to drink wine; therefore that those that drank it might not be undiscovered, but convicted when they met with their acquaintance, kissing became a custom? Or is it for the reason which Aristotle the philosopher hath told us? Even that thing which was commonly reported and said to be done in many places, it seems, was enterprised by the Trojan women in the confines of Italy. For after the men arrived and went ashore, the women set the ships on fire, earnestly longing to be discharged of their roving and seafaring condition; but dreading their husbands' displeasure, they fell on saluting their kindred and acquaintance that met them, by kissing and embracing; whereupon the husbands' anger being appeased and they reconciled, they used for the future this

kind of compliment towards them. Or rather might this usage be granted to women as a thing that gained them reputation and interest, if they appeared hereby to have many and good kindred and acquaintance? Or was it that, it being unlawful to marry kinswomen, a courteous behavior might proceed so far as a kiss, and this was retained only as a significant sign of kindred and a note of a familiar converse among them? For in former time they did not marry women nigh by blood,—as now they marry not aunts or sisters,—but of late they allowed the marrying of cousins for the following reason. A certain man, mean in estate, but on the other hand an honest and a popular man among the citizens, designed to marry his cousin being an heiress, and to get an estate by her. Upon this account he was accused; but the people took little notice of the accusation, and absolved him of the fault, enacting by vote that it might be lawful for any man to marry so far as cousins, but prohibited it to all higher degrees of consanguinity.

Question 7. Why is a husband forbid to receive a gift from his wife, and a wife from her husband?

Solution. What if the reason be as Solon writes it,—describing gifts to be peculiar to dying persons, unless a man being entangled by necessity or wheedled by a woman be enslaved to force which constrains him, or to pleasure which persuades him,—that thus the gifts of husbands and wives became suspected? Or is it that they reputed a gift the basest sign of benevolence (for strangers and they that have no love for us do give us presents), and so took away such a piece of flattery from marriage, that to love and be beloved should be devoid of mercenariness, should be spontaneous and for its own sake, and not for any thing else? Or because women, being corrupted by receiving gifts, are thereby especially brought to admit strangers, did it seem to be a weighty thing to require

them to love their own husbands that give them nothing? Or was it because all things ought to be common between them, the husbands' goods being the wives', and the wives' goods the husbands'? For he that accepts that which is given learns thereby to esteem that which is not given the property of another; so that, by giving but a little to each other, they strip each other of all.

Question 8. Why were they prohibited from taking a gift of a son-in-law or of a father-in-law?

Solution. Is it not of a son-in-law, that a man may not seem to convey a gift to his wife by his father's hands? and of a father-in-law, because it seems just that he that doth not give should not receive?

Question 9. Wherefore is it that they that have wives at home, if they be returning out of the country or from any remote parts, do send a messenger before, to acquaint them that they be at hand?

Solution. Is not this an argument that a man believes his wife to be no idle gossip, whereas to come upon her suddenly and unexpectedly has a show as though he came hastily to catch her and observe her behavior? Or do they send the good tidings of their coming beforehand, as to them that are desirous of them and expect them? Or rather is it that they desire to enquire concerning their wives whether they are in health, and that they may find them at home looking for them? Or because, when the husbands are wanting, the women have more family concerns and business upon their hands, and there are more dissensions and hurly-burly among those that are within doors; therefore, that the wife may free herself from these things and give a calm and pleasant reception to her husband, she hath forewarning of his coming?

Question 10. Wherefore do men in divine service cover their heads; but if they meet any honorable personages

when they have their cloaks on their heads, they are uncovered?

Solution. The latter part of the question seems to augment the difficulty of the former. If now the story told of Aeneas be true, that whilst Diomedes was passing by he offered a sacrifice with his head covered, it is rational and consequent that, while we cover our heads before our enemies, when we meet our friends and good men we should be uncovered. This behavior before the Gods therefore is not their peculiar right, but accidental, continuing to be observed since that example of Aeneas.

If there is any thing further to be said, consider whether we ought not to enquire only after the reason why men in divine service are covered, the other being the consequence of it. For they that are uncovered before men of greater power do not thereby ascribe honor unto them, but rather remove envy from them, that they might not seem to demand or to endure the same kind of reverence which the Gods have, or to rejoice that they are served in the same manner as they. But they worship the Gods in this manner, either showing their unworthiness in all humility by the covering of the head, or rather fearing that some unlucky and ominous voice should come to them from abroad whilst they are praying; therefore they pluck up their cloaks about their ears. That they strictly observed these things is manifest in this, that when they went to consult the oracle, they made a great din all about by the tinkling of brass kettles. Or is it as Castor saith, that the Roman usages were conformable to the Pythagoric notion that the daemon within us stands in need of the Gods without us, and we make supplication to them with a covered head, intimating the body's hiding and absconding of the soul?

Question 11. Why do they sacrifice to Saturn with an uncovered head?

Solution. Is this the reason, that, whereas Aeneas hath

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