

### *On the Custom of Saluting After Sneezing*

It is probable that this custom, so universally prevalent, originated in some ancient superstition; it seems to have excited inquiry among all nations.

Some Catholics, says Father Feyjoo, have attributed the origin of this custom to the ordinance of a pope, Saint Gregory—who is said to have instituted a short benediction to be used on such occasions, at a time when, during a pestilence, the crisis was attended by *sneezing*, and in most cases followed by *death*.

But the rabbins, who have a story for everything, say, that before Jacob men never sneezed but *once*, and then immediately *died*: they assure us that that patriarch was the first who died by natural disease, before him all men died by sneezing; the memory of which was ordered to be preserved in *all nations* by a command of every prince to his subjects to employ some salutary exclamation after the act of sneezing. But these are Talmudical dreams, and only serve to prove that so familiar a custom has always excited inquiry.

Even Aristotle has delivered some considerable nonsense on this Custom; he says it is an honourable acknowledgment of the seat of good sense and genius—the head—to distinguish it from two other offensive eruptions of air, which are never accompanied by any

benediction from the bystanders. The custom at all events existed long prior to Pope Gregory. The lover in Apuleius, Gyton in Petronius, and allusions to it in Pliny, prove its antiquity; and a memoir of the French Academy notices the practice in the New World on the first discovery of America. Everywhere man is saluted for sneezing.

An amusing account of the ceremonies which attend the *sneezing* of a king of Monomotapa shows what a national concern may be the sneeze of despotism.—Those who are near his person, when this happens, salute him in so loud a tone that persons in the antechamber hear it, and join in the acclamation; in the adjoining apartments they do the same, till the noise reaches the street, and becomes propagated throughout the city; so that at each sneeze of his majesty, results a most horrid cry from the salutations of many thousands of his vassals.

When the king of Sennaar sneezes, his courtiers immediately turn their backs on him, and give a loud slap on their right thigh.

With the ancients sneezing was ominous; from the *right* it was considered auspicious; and Plutarch, in his life of Themistocles, says, that before a naval battle it was a sign of conquest! Catullus, in his pleasing

poem of Acme and Septimus, makes this action from the deity of Love from the *left* the source of his fiction. The passage has been elegantly versified by a poetical friend, who finds authority that the gods sneezing on the *right* in *heaven* is supposed to come to us on *earth* on the *left*.

Cupid *sneezing* in his flight  
Once was heard upon the *right*  
Boding woe to lovers true;  
But now upon the *left* he flew,  
And with sporting *sneeze* divine,  
Gave to joy the sacred sign.  
Acme bent her lovely face,  
Flush'd with rapture's rosy grace,  
And those eyes that swam in bliss,  
Prest with many a breathing kiss;  
Breathing, murmuring, soft, and low,  
Thus might life for ever flow!  
"Love of my life, and life of love!  
Cupid rules our fates above,  
Ever let us vow to join  
In homage at his happy shrine."  
Cupid heard the lovers true,  
Again upon the *left* he flew,  
And with sportive *sneeze* divine,  
Renew'd of joy the *sacred sign*!