

Coverley Papers

from

# The Spectator

*WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY*

**K. Deighton**

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## INTRODUCTION.

ADDISON'S life extends over a period of forty-seven years only, from 1672 to 1719. At his birth, Charles the Second was still on the throne; when he died, George the First had been reigning for five years. The interval had witnessed scenes as important as almost any in English history, and the change of thought, of social manners, of political and religious principles, was marked and permanent. With this change was a change in the tone of literature, to bring which about no one contributed more largely than Addison, no one with a spirit so entirely healthy. From the point of view of practical action, Addison's life was uneventful. Though a politician, for many years a Member of Parliament, Under Secretary for Ireland, Chief Secretary for Ireland, and finally Secretary of State, he never distinguished himself as a brilliant administrator, while as a speaker he was a complete failure. The life he loved was that of a student, not so much of books as of mankind; and this life, embellished by literature and poetry, and accompanied by the honour and respect of all whose honour and respect were worth having, he enjoyed almost without interruption. From the peaceful society of his

Brief Sketch  
of Addison's  
Life.

well-loved Latin poets during a sojourn of ten years at Oxford, he passed into the larger sphere of the busy world. A poetical address to Dryden on the subject of his translations from the classical poets brought him to the laureate's notice. By him, as it is supposed, the young poet was made known to Congreve, who in his turn, as stated by Steele, introduced him to Montague, then Chancellor of the Exchequer. Montague, himself a man of letters, if not of great literary skill, was struck with Addison's verses, Latin and English; and feeling that the grace of so facile and polished a writer would be valuable in political affairs, determined to employ him in the diplomatic service. With this object he procured for Addison a pension of £300 a year, to enable him to travel and so acquire that knowledge of foreign languages which was indispensable for a diplomatic career. Furnished with this help, and retaining the fellowship he had won at Oxford, Addison set out for France in 1699, and for nearly a year studied the French language at Blois. Having mastered his task, he repaired, in 1700, to Paris, where he remained till December, mixing with distinguished men of letters, and meeting, among others, the philosopher Malebranche and the critic Boileau. From France he passed on to Italy, and afterwards visited Switzerland, Austria, and Holland, returning to England in the autumn of 1703. Some time before his return, his patron, Montague, now Lord Halifax, had lost office on the accession of Queen Anne, with the consequence to Addison that all his hopes of a diplomatic career came to an end, and his pension was stopped. For more than a year he remained without employment. But "bountiful Fortune," his



“ dear lady,” was never long from his side. In 1704, the more moderate Tories found it prudent to treat the Whigs with a consideration that in their first elevation to power they had not shown; and Lord Treasurer Godolphin, at his wits’ ends to find a poet who would fittingly commemorate the great victory of Blenheim, was glad to conciliate Halifax by accepting his advice that Addison’s help should be sought. Addison complied with the request made to him in very flattering terms, and in a short time produced *The Campaign*. Its success was great and general. As an immediate reward, a Commissionership worth about two hundred pounds a year was bestowed upon the poet; and early in 1706, on the recommendation of Godolphin, his services were further acknowledged by his being made Under Secretary of State. Meanwhile, besides giving considerable help to Steele in his drama of the *Tender Husband*, Addison had published a narrative of his travels in Italy, and brought out an opera entitled *Rosamond*, which seems to have failed owing to its being poorly set to music. In 1708 Addison’s connection with politics became more definite. He was elected to the House of Commons, first for the borough of Lostwithiel and afterwards for Malmesbury, and in 1709 became Chief Secretary for Ireland, sitting in the Irish parliament as member for Cavan. It was while in Ireland that Addison, through the publication of the *Tatler*, was brought into that close literary connection with its editor, Steele, that ultimately led to the birth of the *Spectator*. For a while his papers in the *Tatler* were few and far between, official duties occupying most of his time. But during the winter of 1709 and the latter part of the

following year, both periods being spent in London, his contributions became frequent, and in the end so completely overshadowed those by all others that Steele, in his preface to the final volume, speaks of himself as faring "like a distressed prince who calls in a powerful neighbour to his aid. I was undone by my auxiliary; when I had once called him in, I could not subsist without him." The *Tatler* ceased to appear at the end of 1711, and two months later the *Spectator* took its place. The details of its history will be found further on; but it may here be said that it was a complete success, and pecuniarily most profitable. To Addison this latter fact was of importance. For in 1710 the Ministry had fallen, and with its fall went Addison's secretaryship, as well as a Keepership of Records which brought him in between three and four hundred a year. He had, however, enough to live on with comfort, and probably no part of his life was happier than that in which he created and sustained the *Spectator*. In 1713 he produced his well-known tragedy, *Cato*, the first four acts of which he is said to have had by him since his return from Italy. Though a "passionless and mechanical play," as it has been justly styled, *Cato* had at the time a marvellous success—success in a great measure due to the popularity of its author, and to a determination of both the great political parties to see in its sentiments an endorsement of their own principles. *Cato* was followed by more essays in the *Guardian*, a paper edited by Steele after the *Spectator* had ceased. These, however, were few in number; and with a prose comedy called the *Drummer*, Addison's purely literary career came to an end, though in 1715 and 1716 he published fifty-five numbers of the *Free-*



*holder*, a political paper written in defence of orthodox Whig principles. On the accession of George the First in 1714, Addison again became Chief Secretary for Ireland, a post which in the following year he resigned for a seat at the Board of Trade. In 1716 he married the Countess of Warwick, and a year later became Secretary of State. His breaking health, however, obliged him to abandon office after a tenure of eleven months only, and in his retirement he again began to use his pen. He was anxious to complete a work on the evidences of the Christian religion, already begun; but from this he was diverted by a controversy with Steele on the subject of a Peerage Bill introduced by Sunderland, and so great was the acrimony imported into the discussion that his last days were embittered by the complete rupture of a life-long friendship. For his end was now near at hand. Asthma, from which he had long suffered, was followed by dropsy, and on the 17th of July, 1719, he died at Holland House. His body, after lying in state in the Jerusalem Chamber, was buried in Westminster Abbey, where, though not until 1809, a statue by Westmacott was erected to his memory in the south transept, near to the "Poets' Corner." "It represents him," says Macaulay, "as we can conceive him, clad in his dressing-gown, and freed from his wig, stepping from his parlour at Chelsea into his trim little garden, with the account of the Everlasting Club, or the Loves of Hilpa and Shalum, just finished for the next day's *Spectator*, in his hand. Such a mark of national respect was due to the unsullied statesman, to the accomplished scholar, to the master of pure English eloquence, to the consummate painter of life and manners. It was due, above all, to

the great satirist, who alone knew how to use ridicule without abusing it, who, without inflicting a wound, effected a great social reform, and who reconciled wit and virtue, after a long and disastrous separation, during which wit had been led astray by profligacy, and virtue by fanaticism."

Besides the works already mentioned, Addison was the author of several Latin poems and translations from Latin poets, of a Discourse on Ancient and Modern Learning, a poetical epistle to Halifax, contributions to the *Whig Examiner*, Dialogues on Medals, and some minor pieces.

Spectator.

Previous to the publication of *The Tatler*, the immediate forerunner of *The Spectator*, journalism in England had been of the most meagre and untrustworthy character. In its earliest days it confined itself chiefly to the publication of news from abroad, home news of a political nature being forbidden. By the abolition of the Star Chamber in 1641, a loose was given to the expression of political opinion, and various journals, representative of the royalist and the republican causes, sprang into existence; but this freedom of speech was quickly checked by a Licensing Act, passed in 1647, which virtually gave the Government complete control over the press. Shortly after the expiry of this Act, in 1679, a fresh start was made, and among the variety of papers put into circulation were the *London Gazette* and the *Observer*. Somewhat later, about 1710, appeared the *Examiner*, a Tory paper of which Swift was the mainstay, and the *Whig Examiner*, largely controlled by Addison. Besides these political organs were others of a more general character. "Men of



active and curious minds, with a little leisure and a large love of discussion, loungers at Will's or at the Grecian Coffee-Houses, were anxious to have their doubts on all subjects resolved by a printed oracle. Their tastes were gratified by the ingenuity of John Dunton, whose strange account of his *Life and Errors* throws a strong light on the literary history of this period. In 1690 Dunton published his *Athenian Gazette*, the name of which he afterwards altered to the *Athenian Mercury*. The object of this paper was to answer questions put to the editor by the public. These were of all kinds on religion, casuistry, love, literature, and manners, no question being too subtle or absurd to extract a reply from the conductor of the paper. The *Athenian Mercury* seems to have been read by as many distinguished men of the period as *Notes and Queries* in our own time, and there can be no doubt that the quaint humours it originated gave the first hint to the inventors of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*.<sup>1</sup> *The Tatler*, originally publishing advertisements and news, as well as papers of criticism, anecdote, original poetry, etc., gradually developed into a series of essays on books, morals, and manners; and *The Spectator*, brought out three months after *The Tatler's* disappearance, followed closely its later shape. The plan of *The Spectator* is undoubtedly Addison's, and the portrait of its guiding spirit drawn by him in the first Number is in a measure a portrait of the painter. The club to which he belongs is described by Steele in the next Number. "Four of the club," says Macaulay,<sup>2</sup> "the templar, the clergyman, the soldier,

<sup>1</sup> Courthope, *Addison, English Men of Letters Series*, pp. 87, 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Essay on Addison*.

and the merchant, were uninteresting figures, fit only for a background. But the other two, an old country baronet and an old town rake, though not delineated with a very delicate pencil, had some good strokes. Addison took the rude outlines into his own hands, retouched them, coloured them, and is in truth the creator of the Sir Roger de Coverley and the Will Honeycomb with whom we are all familiar." <sup>1</sup> The characters thus grouped "represent considerable classes or sections of the community, and are, as a rule, men of strongly marked opinions, prejudices, and foibles, which furnish inexhaustible matter of comment to the Spectator himself, who delivers the judgments of reason and common-sense. Sir Roger de Coverley, with his simplicity, his high sense of honour, and his old-world reminiscences, reflects the country gentleman of the best kind; Sir Andrew Freeport expresses the opinions of the enterprising, hard-headed, and rather hard-hearted monied interest; Captain Sentry speaks for the army; the Templar for the world of taste and learning; the Clergyman for theology and philosophy; while Will Honeycomb, the elderly man of fashion, gives the Spectator many opportunities for criticizing the traditions of morality and breeding surviving from the

<sup>1</sup> Courthope, p. 174, describes these words as "a very misleading account of the matter," since it seems to suggest that Sir Roger was "merely the stray phantom of Steele's imagination," whereas it "was from the first intended to be a *type* of a country gentleman," and was "so truly conceived as to lend itself easily to the treatment of writers who approached it with various conceptions and very unequal degrees of skill"; those writers being Addison, Steele, Budgell, and Tickell.



days of the Restoration.”<sup>1</sup> The success of *The Spectator* was immediate and permanent. “The number of copies daily distributed was at first three thousand. It subsequently increased, and had risen to near four thousand when the stamp tax was imposed. That tax was fatal to a crowd of journals. The *Spectator*, however, stood its ground, doubled its price, and, though its circulation fell off, still yielded a large revenue to the state and to the authors. For particular papers the demand was immense; of some, it is said, twenty thousand copies were required. But this was not all. To have the *Spectator* served up every morning with the bohea and rolls was a luxury for the few. The majority were content to wait till essays enough had appeared to form a volume. Ten thousand copies of each volume were immediately taken off, and new editions were called for. It must be remembered, that the population of England was then hardly a third of what it now is. The number of Englishmen who were in the habit of reading, was probably not a sixth of what it now is. A shopkeeper or a farmer who found any pleasure in literature, was a rarity. Nay, there was doubtless more than one knight of the shire whose country seat did not contain ten books, receipt books and books on farriery included. In these circumstances, the sale of the *Spectator* must be considered as indicating a popularity quite as great as that of the most successful works of Sir Walter Scott and Mr. Dickens in our own time”<sup>2</sup> Addison’s share in the work was nearly one half of the whole, his papers being 274 as against 236 contributed

<sup>1</sup> Courtnope, *Addison*, pp. 106, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Macaulay, *Essay on Addison*.



by Steele, the remainder being made up by various writers, such as Hughes, Budgell, Tickeil, Phillips, etc. But the mere number of papers due to Addison is a wholly inadequate measure of their importance. They are not only incomparably superior to all the rest, but the very life and soul of the undertaking. They give to *The Spectator* the tone which runs through it from first to last. They prescribe the area over which discussion shall range. Rigorously excepting everything of a party nature, Addison addresses himself to humanity as a whole. Nothing is too trivial for him, if so be that the men and women of his time may find a healthy interest in it; if under the mask of humour, banter, and irony he may expose the littleness of ambitions, the follies of fashion, the empty beliefs of a vacant mind; if the foibles and eccentricities whether of town or country life can be pressed into the service of a warm-hearted, uncensorious philosophy. Allegory and apologue, fable and anecdote, are as much the weapons of his warfare against evil as the more studied exercises of serious argument and lofty morality, and their efficacy without doubt much greater. It was his endeavour, he tells us, "to enliven morality with wit, and to temper wit with morality," his ambition to have it said of him that he had "brought Philosophy out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and coffee-houses," his belief that it was better "to amuse ourselves with such writings as tend to the wearing out of ignorance, passion, and prejudice than such as naturally conduce to inflame hatreds, and make enmities irreconcilable." The catholicity of his spirit as regards the public whom he addressed has frequently

been pointed out. Swift, indeed, sneered at him for the prominence he gave to feminine affairs and the importance he attached to enlisting the interest of women. But Addison knew his times. He knew, what is still better, how largely the purity and the dignity of social life depend upon the place which women hold in that life, how great the influence their cultivation has upon the general cultivation, how varied the power which for good or evil they wield in the education of their children; while at the same time he had the good sense to recognize and the chivalry to avow, as had never before been recognized and avowed, the claims they can put forth to an equality of enjoyment of all that is elevated and noble in literature. If the tone of men's society was to be raised, as Addison hoped to raise it, policy no less than justice demanded a change in the relations of the sexes, demanded that what was pure should also be enlightened, what was naturally refined and tender should be fitted to communicate that refinement and tenderness. Hence no one will nowadays regret the share of *The Spectator* which falls to womanly pursuits and concerns. Nor merely from the point of interest and enjoyment will there be any wish that that share had been less. For in none of the series is Addison's play of fancy more delicate, in none his grace and pathos more graceful and pathetic. Party Patches and Ladies' Head-dresses may in themselves seem trifles too airy for robust consideration, the Dissection of a Coquette's Heart and the doubts and hesitations that perplexed Hilpa's choice, texts all too slight for the stern moralist; yet none but a temperament sullen and moody as Swift's would endure to lose the bright imagery with which



they are lighted up, the geniality and picturesque setting that Addison's touch alone could bestow. All these characteristics in more or less prodigality are to be seen throughout his papers. But of the various gifts that fitted him for his self-imposed task, the most perfect was his sense of humour, humour that while free from all bitterness was yet exquisitely penetrative,—a humour, like Jaques's melancholy, "compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects." Amiable and urbane, laughing at his fellow-men but laughing with no scorn,—rather as one who understands and sympathizes,—with gentle pressure he puts his finger on their foibles, and cajoles as much as argues them out of their propensities. Popular superstitions, personal whims, caprices, idiosyncrasies, social manners, pursuits, fashions, in their turn find themselves within his hold, to be examined, dandled, caressed, rebuked, sentenced. Irony, all-delicious in its gravity, forms a large, perhaps the largest, constituent of his humour; pathos of the truest ring is seldom far off. Argument is pointed by analogy and a sprightly cheerfulness quickens what is serious. Permeating everything we have an imaginative faculty such as belongs to the poet mind alone, an appreciation of the ludicrous that must have demanded constant self-restraint, a delicacy of feeling that made coarseness as impossible to his use as it was painful to his own sensitive organization, an absolute purity of object, a far-seeing philanthropy, a serene dignity of soul and conduct. As regards Addison's style, of no one could it be more truly said that the style is the man. He has a manner, but no mannerisms. That manner many have striven to make their own, but have striven in vain.



For behind it stand the loving nature to which everything human is the object of affectionate concern, the placid temper that no passion could ruffle, a life unsullied by excess, a deep yet simple piety, powers of observation ever on the watch, the discipline of travel, an inherited love of letters to which the study of his country's masterpieces and the models of classical refinement had given precision, freedom, grace of movement, aptness of illustration, sobriety of tone, unerring sense of proportion. Johnson may justly say that "whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison." He must do so, however, with a contented foreknowledge that as easily may he imprison "the viewless winds" as catch the airy grace with which Mr. Spectator bears himself along.

#### STEELE.

The following outline of Steele's career, abridged, from Professor Minto's article in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, will probably suffice for the student. Born in Dublin in 1672, Richard Steele entered the Charterhouse in 1684, and there first met Addison, his junior in age by a few weeks only. Five years later he proceeded to Merton College, Oxford, Addison being at the time an undergraduate of Magdalen. But the want of steadiness which followed him through life manifested itself even in these early days, and he left the university without taking his degree. His next step was to enter the army as a volunteer, serving for a time under the

Duke of Ormonde. A poem on the funeral of Mary (1695), dedicated to Lord Cutts, colonel of the Coldstream Guards, brought him under the notice of that officer, who gave him a commission in his own regiment, and later procured for him a company in Lord Lucas's fusiliers. A prose treatise, *The Christian Hero*, 1701, procured him the favour of William, though the king died before anything had been done for its author. His next literary effort, a comedy entitled *The Funeral*, 1701, was well received on the stage, and was shortly followed by two other comedies, *The Lying Lover*, 1703, and *The Tender Husband*, 1705; the former, according to Steele himself, being "damned for its piety," the latter meeting with more success. But the best of his comedies, *The Conscious Lovers*, did not appear till 1722. In 1707 Steele was appointed to the office of Gazeteer, and his work as editor of the *Gazette* led to the *Tatler*, and this in its turn to the *Spectator*. The *Spectator* was followed by the *Guardian*, to which also Addison contributed. Other periodicals set on foot by Steele were the *Englishman*, 1714, an assailant of the policy of the Tory ministry; the *Lover*, more general in its aims; the *Reader*, an opposition journal to the Tory *Examiner*; *Town-Talk*, the *Tea Table*, *Chit-Chat*, and the most famous of his political papers, the *Plebeian*, in which he carried on a vigorous controversy with Addison over Sunderland's Peerage Bill. His last venture in journalism was the *Theatre*, 1719-1720; but besides these papers, he was the author of numerous pamphlets on a variety of subjects. A zealous Whig, his fortunes varied with those of his party, and his enthusiasm often brought him into trouble. Thus, on the question of



the fortifications of Dunkirk in 1713, he threw up a pension and a commissionership of stamps in order to go into parliament and attack the ministry. The language of his pamphlet on the *Crisis* was stigmatized as seditious and he was in consequence expelled the House. His expulsion brought forth *An Apology for himself and his Writings* which contains many biographical details of importance. On the accession of the house of Hanover, Steele received various lucrative appointments, yet these notwithstanding he could never free himself from his financial difficulties, but was compelled in 1724 to retire from London and live in the country. His last years were spent on his wife's estate of Llangunnor in Wales, where, after a paralytic seizure which broke down his health, he died 1st September, 1729. As a man, Steele was impulsive, frequent in extremes, careless of the proprieties, but generous, affectionate, full of worthy enthusiasms, modest in his estimate of himself, ever ready to acknowledge superior merit, and charitable towards the faults and follies at which he laughed. As a writer, he is remarkable for his versatility in conceiving humorous types of character, for the wide range of his sympathies, for his vigorous, if sometimes commonplace, style, and for the readiness with which he adapts himself to his subject whether grave or gay in character. With Addison he could not compete in delicacy of humour, in scholarly precision, or refinement of thought; but he undoubtedly possessed greater originality of invention, and perhaps a more masculine turn of mind.



## BUDGELL.

The third of the contributors to the Coverley papers was Eustace Budgell, born in 1685. Like Addison and Steele, he owed part of his education to Oxford, and like the former became a good classical scholar, besides being well read in the best English, French, and Italian authors. From Oxford he proceeded to the Inner Temple, but forsaking law gave himself up to literature. He was befriended by Addison, a connection on the mother's side, and when the latter was appointed secretary to Lord Wharton, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, in 1710, he took Budgell with him as one of the clerks of his office. Later on, through Addison's interest, he obtained several other appointments of much larger emolument; but owing to a lampoon in which he was unwise enough to satirize the Duke of Bolton, then Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, under whom he was serving, he forfeited his appointment of comptroller-general of the revenue in Ireland, and was obliged to return to England. Further misfortunes soon befel him. In 1720 he lost £20,000 in the South Sea scheme, and wasted a further sum of £5,000 in an unsuccessful attempt to get into parliament. In 1733, on the death of Dr. Tindal, a legacy of two thousand guineas was willed to him; but the bequest (which it was alleged had been inserted in the will by Budgell himself) was successfully disputed by the next of kin, and the unfortunate man, now in great straits, betook himself to the study of law as the only source of livelihood left to him. After being called to the bar and attending the courts for some time, he found his

affairs desperate, and in 1736 he put an end to his life by drowning himself. He was a contributor to the *Tatler* and the *Guardian* as well as to the *Spectator*, and in 1733 he set on foot a weekly periodical, called the *Bee*, which ran for above a hundred numbers. His writings, if not possessed of any striking qualities, are those of an educated and well-read man, while the two papers included in the present selection betray a turn for humour, with perhaps an attempt at imitating Addison's literary style and habit of thought.

#### THE COVERLEY PAPERS.

To Steele, as has been often pointed out, is due the suggestion of Sir Roger's character; and his paper "Of the Club" shadows forth almost all those traits which Addison afterwards expanded and developed with such happy skill. A type of the country gentleman of those days, Sir Roger has the pride of birth and long descent which belonged to his order, the foibles and oddities that come of a life narrowed by converse chiefly with men of his own class or those in dependence on him, the further foibles and oddities caused by a disappointment in love which drove him back upon himself yet without souring his nature, the vigorous geniality which life in the open air and the healthy excitement of field sports encourage, the simplicity of a heart that has hardly known what it is to be deceived, a proper sense of his position as a county magnate and of the duties that position involves, the duty of setting an example of decorum in church, the duty of strictly preserving game, of looking askance at gipsies, of assert-

ing his dignity at quarter-sessions, where, as Steele humorously tells us, he on a certain occasion "gained universal applause by explaining a passage in the Game Act," the duty of ungrudging hospitality, the duty of avoiding a Whig inn, even at the cost of thin beer and ill-kept mutton. With these and such-like themes for his discourse, Addison loves to disport himself, drawing from each topic some quaint lesson of morality, some material for playful satire, some occasion for depicting the occupations, pursuits, and social doings of a class of men even then fast passing away. If, a Whig himself, he finds food for mirth in the eccentricities of the simple-minded Tory squire, it is with a tender hand that he holds him up for our amusement, and with genuine delight that he sets in relief the amiable qualities which mingle with each weakness and more than excuse the old-world prejudices of a character as much the outcome of its surroundings as due to the moulding of nature. With all his sly ridicule of whims and caprices, of ignorances and illiberalities, he takes care that nothing like contempt should be suggested, that nothing but love and respect should be felt for one who is all love for his fellow-creatures, and who never forgets his own self-respect. Addison is in fact a gentleman, in the best sense of the word, dealing with a gentleman; and the mark of his persiflage is not a butt for his scorn. This delicacy of feeling no doubt influenced his coadjutors, and if his richness of fancy and the exquisite touch of his raillery have given to the original outline a finish that was beyond their powers, they have at least not unworthily followed the master hand in their share of the Coverley picture.