

**ESSAYS
FROM ADDISON**

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Essays from Addison by J. H. Fowler

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J. H. FOWLER

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FROM ADDISON**

English Literature for Secondary Schools
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Essays from Addison

*Selected and Edited, with Introductions, Notes
Glossary, etc., by*

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Assistant Master at Clifton College; Author of
'A Manual of Essay-Writing,' etc.

'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.'—JOHNSON.

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INTRODUCTION.

NOBLE English prose, and even noble English essays, had been written long before Addison. But we are justified in regarding Addison and his friend Steele as the founders of the modern English essay and modern English prose; and the larger share of the achievements was Addison's. It was he, more than any one else, who invented a "middle style,"—something between the grave stately diction of formal writing and the free and easy speech of every day; a style suited, therefore, for addressing a wide circle of readers on a wide variety of subjects, unpretentious, admirably clear, dignified, but never stilted. This fact makes him still, as in Dr. Johnson's day, the best model for most of us. It is the "middle style" that is needed in almost all human intercourse—in the writing of essays, novels, histories, sermons, speeches, newspapers, letters; and even as a model for conversation, to prevent it sinking into the merely trivial and slipshod, a petty exchange of personal remarks expressed in indifferent English eked out by slang. None can show us better than "the dear parson in the tye-wig" how social intercourse may be bright and sparkling, yet elevated and elevating, with a tendency to increase the happiness of those who take part in it, and to check unworthy thoughts and feelings.

But such influence is often best when it is most unconsciously given and received. It is good to read Addison first because he is full of charm; because we soon come to feel an affection for this silent, keen, kindly spectator of men; because he brings back to us vividly the vanished life of the early eighteenth

century ; because he created in Sir Roger de Coverley one of the most delightful characters in the whole range of English literature. If we sometimes seem to see the Spectator's eyes—grave, but with a twinkle in them—turned upon our own follies, and are willing to receive a playful rebuke or gentle hint from him, that will be another advantage to add to the rest.

I. LIFE.

JOSEPH ADDISON, son of the Rev. Lancelot Addison, dean of Lichfield, was born on May 1st, 1672, at Milston, Wiltshire. He was educated at Lichfield, and afterwards at Charterhouse, where Steele, whose name was in later years to be associated so closely with his, was a younger schoolfellow. Steele visited him at Lichfield, and has commemorated the charm of his home circle in the *Tatler* (No. 26). "The boys behaved themselves very early with a manly friendship ; and their sister, instead of the gross familiarities and impertinent freedoms in behaviour usual in other houses, was always treated by them with as much complaisance as any other young lady of their acquaintance. It was an unspeakable pleasure to visit or sit at a meal in that family. I have often seen the old man's heart flow at his eyes with joy upon occasions which would appear indifferent to such as were strangers to the turn of his mind ; but a very slight accident, wherein he saw his children's good-will to one another, created in him the godlike pleasure of loving them because they loved each other."

In 1687 Addison went to Oxford. At first he was a commoner of Queen's College, but he was given a demyship (*i.e.* scholarship) at Magdalen for his classical attainments, and in due course proceeded to a fellowship. He won a reputation which extended beyond Oxford for his Latin verses.

In his twenty-eighth year Addison went abroad to perfect his education for political life by a prolonged continental tour. He visited France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, and Holland, and remained away from England for more than four years.

Soon after his return he wrote his poem of the *Campaign* to celebrate Marlborough's victory at Blenheim, August 1704, and