

**SIR ROGER DE  
COVERLEY. BY  
THE SPECTATOR**

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Sir Roger De Coverley. By the Spectator by Joseph Addison

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**JOSEPH ADDISON**

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# Sir Roger de Coverley.

BY THE SPECTATOR.



THE NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS BY W. HENRY WILLS :

THE ENGRAVINGS BY THOMPSON, FROM

DESIGNS BY FRED. TAYLER.



LONDON :

LONGMAN, BROWN, GREEN, AND LONGMANS.

1850.



### ADVERTISEMENT.

**T**HE aim of the *Spettator*, as defined by Dr. Johnson, was “to teach the minuter decencies and inferior duties; to regulate the practice of daily conversation; to correct those depravities which are rather ridiculous than criminal, and remove those grievances which if they produce no lasting calamities, impress hourly vexation.” The machinery adopted by the *Spettator* to accomplish this object—to soften the harshness of his censures, to disarm the sharpest strictures of the smallest offence—was a club; the members of which—after the grave taciturn ubiquitous keen, but kindly, *Spettator* himself—were representatives of the various classes of society whose faults and absurdities rendered them most in need of pertinent admonition. To the coarse intemperate ignorant and arrogant country esquires of that day, the gentle Mentor spoke through Sir ROGER DE CO-

VERLEY: no model magistrate, or self-righteous censor; but a hearty humorous plain old gentleman—one of themselves—with enough of their foibles tastes and prejudices to win their sympathies and to charm them into reformation.

None of the characters were elaborated with so much care—to none was imparted such thorough completeness, as that of Sir ROGER DE COVERLEY; between which (to quote a saying of Horace Walpole) and Sir John Falstaff—though a wide interval—nothing like it exists in literature for truthfulness and finish. Sir ROGER's eccentricities do not, as some have written, disturb the consistency of the character: on the contrary they strengthen its individuality. If they be discords, instead of jarring, they enrich the harmony. They are precisely the humours of an honest elderly sensitive bachelor, whose early history had been dashed with the romance of his having been jilted. Sir ROGER does nothing and says nothing which might not have been said and done, in his day, by any warm-hearted rustic gentleman who had been irredeemably crossed in love. Indeed, turning thus from Nature to the consummate Art which copied her, it can scarcely be denied that the character owes its immortality to the quaint traits of extravagance

which have been stigmatized as blemishes: without impairing the efficacy of Sir ROGER as a special admonitory example to the country esquire of the reign of Queen Anne, his oddities were destined to rivet the interest and excite the affectionate smile of all readers in all time.

The essays which separate the Coverley papers from one another, however exquisite in themselves, break the spell which binds the reader while lingering over the benevolence or humour of the Worcestershire baronet. Even when arranged more conveniently in a sequence, as in this book, it is not pleasing to remember that so captivating an Identity was originated and wrought out by "several hands." Every fresh lineament of the good Sir ROGER so strengthens the sense of Unity, that we rather love to be deluded with the notion that the whole was the work of one mind. With all art so perfect that it conceals art, we prefer the ignorance which is our bliss, to the knowledge that reveals the companionships, contrivances, or agonies of authorcraft. Though curiosity is gratified, sentiment is hurt, when we are told that the outlines of Sir ROGER DE COVERLEY were imagined and partly traced by Sir Richard Steele; that the colouring and more prominent lineaments were elaborated by



Joseph Addison; that some of the back-ground was put in by Eustace Budgell; and, that the portrait was defaced by either Steele or Thomas Tickell with a deformity which Addison repudiated and which is not here reproduced.

The sum of the account in hard figures stands thus;—Sir ROGER DE COVERLEY's adventures, opinions, and conversations occur in thirty of the *Spectator's* papers. Of these, Addison wrote twenty, Budgell two, and Steele eight; if it be certain that he was the author of the obnoxious portion of No. 410; which has also been attributed to Tickell.

But over this divided labour, all evidence proves that Addison exercised a rigid and harmonising editorial vigilance. In the words of an accurate critic, "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." The habits of Addison and Steele were those of a close literary partnership. What Steele's quick impatient genius planned, Addison's rich taste and thoughtful industry executed: what were, and would perhaps have ever remained, dreams in Steele's brain, came out distinct realities

from under Addison's hand. Between them Pope's maxim was fully obeyed :—

“ To write with fervour and correct with phlegm.”

Steele supplied some of the fervour : Addison all the finish, all the phlegm.

But, it must be repeated, those who love Sir ROGER DE COVERLEY love not these ungenial revelations. They like to feel that the fine-hearted creation comes from a single source ;—from those nicely-balanced stores of touching pathos and refined humour ; of sound common-sense and polished wit ; of keen satire and kind words ; of sharp observation and genial description which exist in the single gentleman who paints his own portrait in the first pages, and who is known wherever English letters can be read, as

“ THE SPECTATOR.”



## LIST OF ENGRAVINGS

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